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# THE NATURE OF RELIGIOUS TRUTH

*SERMONS PREACHED IN BALLIOL COLLEGE CHAPEL*

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BY

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TO

MRS. T. H. GREEN

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# PREFACE

THE sermons in this volume were all preached in Balliol Chapel, though the seventh is given in the form in which it was rewritten for a service in St. Aldate's Church in Oxford on Industrial Sunday, 1927.

In the paper from which the volume takes its title I have attempted to expand what was originally a sermon by adding to it a discussion of more technical nature than a sermon would allow, as to the nature of religious truth; and the view there expressed is the presupposition of most of what is said in the previous sermons. The sermon on Forgiveness has been already published in *The Student Movement.*

I have ventured to publish what was

written for a particular audience, because my experience is that there are a great many people nowadays to whom Christian doctrines are neither true nor untrue, but simply meaningless. This is not because they are indifferent to the real issues involved in these doctrines, but because they have neither the traditions nor the equipment that are needed to make the traditional statement of doctrine expressive and significant for them. In such a situation an attempt to make issues and meanings more immediately realisable and to show what kind of meaning is to be looked for in doctrine may be of service. What a difficult task this is and what pitfalls beset it I am well aware.

A. D. LINDSAY.

*Balliol College, Oxford,*
1927.

# CONTENTS


| | | PAGE |
|---|---|---|
| | PREFACE . . . . . | vii |
| I. | IN MEMORIAM ARTHUR LIONEL SMITH<br>Hebrews xiii. 13–14. | 1 |
| II. | WASTE . . . . . | 17 |
| | Matthew x. 29. | |
| III. | THE YOUNG MAN WHO HAD GREAT POSSESSIONS . . . . . | 35 |
| | Mark x. 17–22. | |
| IV. | THE PROMISE OF POWER . . . . | 53 |
| | Matthew xviii. 19–20. | |
| V. | ATONEMENT . . . . . | 75 |
| | John xxi. 3. | |
| VI. | SAVING FAITH . . . . . | 97 |
| | Acts xvi. 30–34. | |
| VII. | THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST . . . | 117 |
| | 1 Peter i. 21. | |
| VIII. | IDOLS . . . . . | 137 |
| | Isaiah ii. 8. | |
| IX. | THE NATURE OF RELIGIOUS TRUTH . | 159 |

# I

# IN MEMORIAM

## ARTHUR LIONEL SMITH

MASTER OF BALLIOL COLLEGE

1916—1924

# I

## IN MEMORIAM—ARTHUR LIONEL SMITH

"Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come."—Hebrews xiii. 13–14.

TWO months ago when we all of us knew that the Master would never be able to be active again, that he was only waiting for the call to go over the river, I heard a sermon on this text, which seems to me so well to describe the secret of the Master's life and influence and the spirit of this College that, if it had been possible, I should have liked to get the preacher to come here and redeliver his sermon this evening, that I might have said, "*That* is what the Master was like and that is what has made Balliol great."

All I can do in default of that is to pass on to you something of what the preacher said, and some of the thoughts his words set going in my mind.

He began by explaining that the word *camp* in this passage meant a permanent Roman camp, the settled quarters of an army of occupation in an alien country, keeping alive those things that Rome stood for in a land of barbarians; a camp that often became so permanent that it settled down into a city which men had no intention of leaving; and then he unfolded the picture implied in the text—and what I remember most vividly of his sermon is that picture—" the camp of the army of occupation in a hostile country, and from one of its gates a small forlorn hope setting out, and far away on the distant horizon a city —or is it a city or only a fairy structure built by the clouds in the sunset? "

One can see what a key that picture is

to the mind of the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews—a man who loved the long, historical tradition of his own Jewish people —dwelling on the details of Jewish ritual and its traditional allegorical interpretation with some of which it is hard for us to sympathise; but also seeing Jewish history, as the great eleventh chapter makes clear, as illumined by a succession of men who had faith; a succession of men who had learnt so to love the true spirit of their camp, not its defences or its rules or its historical embodiment, but its spirit and purpose, that they knew that

> The skin and shell of things, though fair,
> Were not their wish, nor prayer,

that the fixed structure could in itself be no continuing city; and they were ready to leave the permanent camp and go beyond the pale.

All the permanent camps were of use

because they helped to keep alive what had been won by the men who had so gone without the camp before. Each of these men, when he went, seemed to himself to be leaving all that was stable and certain and secure—all the elements of the continuing city, and going after something very unsubstantial and visionary. Yet the camps had got nobler and had come to shelter a wider and deeper life just because the men who loved them had been willing to go beyond them. "And truly if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned: but now they desire a better country, that is an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for He hath prepared for them a city." So in a paradoxical climax he can say, in words with which we are familiar but which I think we seldom believe, that the spirit which drove these

men on, faith, "is the *substance* of things hoped for."

The writer thought that his people were faced with the greatest of decisive choices which the process of building camps and of leaving them had ever produced. A man had come who loved and reverenced the Law and the Prophets as no man had done before him, and who had, more decisively than any had ever done before, gone beyond the camp, and "suffered without the gate"; and this man's nation had the choice of clinging to the camp although it had done its work and all the spirit and life were out of it, or of "going forth with him, without the camp, bearing his reproach." And so the author writes this long letter to explain to his people that the more they love and understand the spirit and history of their camp the more they must be prepared to go on beyond it.

This is the plain simple truth about all

life. Whether you look at the history of life as Biology describes it, or at the growth of individual character, or at the evolution of society, this process is evident. Life is always organising systems, evolving forms, machinery of some kind or another; without such structure, habit, social institution,

> the most difficult of tasks to *keep*
> Heights which the soul is competent to gain

would become entirely impossible; but if the living process stops—if there is no undetermined growing point—if the structure is prized for its own sake, the habit taken as unalterable, the social institution or the dogma made the ruler and not the server of life, then death follows.

He that would save his life will lose it, is ordinarily thought of as an appeal to a rare and high conduct to which few can respond. So in a sense it is. Yet in simple matters we are all convinced of its truth.

In simple matters we acknowledge that we must have both the form and the transcending spirit. No one thinks we could walk without a skeleton, or that skeletons could walk of themselves; but in the affairs of the spirit we constantly tend to behave as though one or other of these impossibilities were true: as though one could write poetry either by a mere following of rules or by merely getting one's eye in a fine frenzy rolling.

In the affairs of the spirit the process of building structures and going beyond them is an endless one; and the structures and systems are always asking us to worship them, to forget the spirit that informed them, and to settle down for good in the permanent camp. When that happens, when man's spirit worships its own creation, then structures and systems become idols so hideous that decent men try to give up worship altogether: the permanent camp,

when the spirit of life has gone out of it, becomes so cruel and forbidding that men who are pilgrims forswear any kind of encampment at all and perish miserably in the desert, all their gain the spoil of the barbarians.

We in this College know something of the spirit of an institution which feels itself an armed camp in an enemy's country, something of that intense spirit of corporate pride that glories in its own achievements and feels that without are dogs and barbarians. But we all know when we think of it that, when we are doing that, we are turning to our own base uses the glories gained in a very different spirit. If we can go on thinking of the College as the most wonderful place in the world, and long may we be able to do that it will be because we can keep it what it has been in the past—a Fellowship whose members are trying to learn the lesson—harder perhaps for a

corporation than for an individual to learn —"He that would be greatest among you let him be servant of all," who are imbued with the pilgrim spirit, and have turned their backs on Mr. Worldly Wiseman and the town of Carnal Policy and have set their faces towards Mount Zion.

That is the spirit that made the Master so great a man and so good a servant of his day and generation. He had an intense love of and pride in the College. But just because of that he always wanted the College to give, as he gave himself, unstintingly and unhesitatingly to all demands, and by doing so he acquired an influence over great sections of English life and made the name of Balliol a household word among people who before had hardly heard of Oxford, or, if they had, thought of it only as a proud alien institution. He was a great lover of the past, and he made his pupils love and reverence the past, but he did that sur-

passingly well, because he loved not the dead bones but the living, everlastingly young human spirit, whenever and wherever it showed itself in men or in the life of human institutions. He took little or no concern in dogma because he found God, and taught his pupils to see God, not in systems—least of all in abstractions—but in the highest workings of human personalities.

And that belief that we come nearest the divine in reverence and love for the best in man, which was the great lesson of the Master's teaching and work, is the doctrine of this Epistle. Time and again when men have dreamed and thought of the city which is to come they have pictured it as something essentially permanent and unchanging and absolute, and have tried to construct for it a constitution or a code of rules, or a system of beliefs which time could not touch —a precise outline of the pattern laid up in heaven, a faith once for all delivered to

the saints; and time and again such would-be absolute patterns have shown themselves to be mortal like all other works of men's hands, and when these absolutes fail men sometimes despair and think that there is no sure guide to Mount Zion.

Nor is there any such guide so long as men think only of the past, nor so long as they will not regard the past at all; so long as men think only of their own small circle or society, nor so long as they have not learnt so to love their own circle that they get strength from that love to go out beyond it. But the men who have learnt the real truth of human fellowships have never any doubt about the way, and they are to us what the author of the Epistle calls a great Cloud of Witnesses.

Our author is quite sure of his directions: we are to go "unto him, bearing his reproach." We are to "look to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith." "Jesus

Christ is the same yesterday and to-day and for ever." But Christ is that for our author, and we can apprehend him as such, not by reason of any magical or mechanical transcendence of the world of time—not because he belongs altogether to an eternal sphere beyond the world of becoming and decay, but because he is, as St. Paul says, "the first-born of many brethren."

We can discuss endlessly systems and dogmas, and such things can only be understood with the aid of historical imagination and knowledge of historical context, but the spirit of a good man has about it something eternal which the process of history does not touch. The simple and immortal fact, easy to apprehend and sure to stand by, is the spirit in men which this Epistle calls faith, and those who live in the spirit and follow the example of men of such faith will build their camps nearer and nearer to the city.

The Master had singularly the gift of recognising in past history and in present life those many brethren of that first-born who went beyond the camp. He helped others to perceive the Cloud of Witnesses. It was given him to carry forward their work because he had faith to know of all God's saints that—

> They are indeed our pillar fires
> Seen as we go,
> They are that city's shining spires
> We travel to.

# II

# WASTE

## II

### WASTE

"Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And not one of them shall fall on the ground without your Father."—Matthew x. 29.

WE are meeting this evening for the first time since the changes in the chapel that are meant to serve as a visible memorial of those members of the College who lost their lives in the war. Our memorial to them has taken several forms. We have already put up and dedicated the tablets in the chapel passage which bear their names. There is now in existence a War Memorial Fund whose purpose it is to make the College better able to do its work as "a place of religion, learning and education." But a portion of that fund was

definitely set aside to be spent on making the chapel a more beautiful place, because it was felt that somehow or other this memorial to the fallen ought to be connected with our religious life, and the simplest way of symbolising that feeling was that some visible memorial should be set up in our College chapel.

This memorial within the chapel is still incomplete. But it would hardly be possible for us to see for the first time the chapel as it now is and not think again of the special significance of this part of our War Memorial, not ask ourselves especially what is the significance of our thinking that the commemoration of all these 192 members of the College who fell in the war should be connected with our religion and find visible expression in our chapel. We have a right to set up such a memorial in chapel only if we think that the deaths of these men are somehow a witness to our faith, that some-

how the early loss and apparently wasteful loss of all these lives, so full of promise and of hope, should lead us not only to pay our tribute of admiration to them, to their bravery and readiness to give up their lives, but should also be a cause of our believing with more confidence in God. Yet that is surely a paradox and we had better face it.

To ask why do we or how dare we connect our War Memorial with our religion may seem an unnecessary and far-fetched question. Is not Christianity the commemoration of a sacrifice, the glorification of and the exulting in a tragedy? Do not all its rites centre round the recalling to our minds and the acting over again of a deserted and shameful death? Where could the tragedy of which we want to set up a memorial be better commemorated than in a Christian chapel?

Yes, but on the death of Christ has been built such an edifice of formulæ and insti-

tutions, so much use and wont, that familiarity has blunted the strangeness of making that the centre of our religion. There our feelings towards the cross are so affected by all the centuries in which men have made it a symbol to be revered and adored that we forget that it was a gallows. If the cross of Christ is to us neither a stumbling-block nor foolishness, that is not always because it is the power of God and the wisdom of God, but because it has for us no very vital meaning at all. And we have to understand what a stumbling-block and what foolishness in one sense it is, before we can come to know it as the power of God and the wisdom of God.

But the loss of these men is fresh in our minds; it is still first and foremost a tragedy; it has all the evident appearance of senseless and useless waste; and though through the sacrifices of these men and of countless others the war was won, their

death is perhaps above all part of a stupendous failure, not of their failure, but of a general failure and breakdown of humanity, of which their death was part of the price.

There is perhaps some advantage in our completing this memorial so many years after the war. For during the war we were all of us stirred with the generous enthusiasm, the forgetfulness of self, the instant devotion of men of whom these we commemorate here were but a small fraction, too deeply to doubt that it would meet an adequate and just reward; that, when the war was over, that enthusiasm and devotion would make the world a different and a fairer place, so that men looking back on the dangers and horrors of the war could say that what they had endured had been worth while; could feel that if those who fell could revisit the world after the war, they would see the evident reward of what they had undergone. These hopes have been disappointed. We

are living in a time of disillusion and disenchantment, in a world full of suspicion and fear and distrust. We see the wreckage of war not simply in all the lives we have lost, but in the broken nerves and the disintegrated moral standards of great masses of mankind. We need not regret the part we played in the war, we can be conscious that we did win a victory over force which would have made the world a still more evil place; we can be sure that but for these great efforts we might have all sunk still further back; and yet feel that as a whole the world after the war is a poorer and less hopeful place than it was before. At least the generation which fought in the war will not see the reward of its sufferings and struggles. When we face these facts, they seem sometimes to give us a view of a world in which there is little room for religion; where the serene confidence and trust of this text, " One of them shall not fall to the

ground without your Father," seems a foolish credulity based on a complete disregard of the facts. Can we possibly go on believing that the world is in the hands of an all-loving and all-powerful Father, for whom " the very hairs of your head are all numbered " ? Must we not recognise that Nature is as indifferent to our aspirations and struggles as she is to those of the sparrows; that all life, human and animal life alike, is in the grip of blind, merciless forces? The horrors of the war, and perhaps above all its fearful display of collective waste and folly, seem to have been for many minds the final confirmation of that belief in a blind and godless world towards which much of the thought of the last two centuries had been moving. Nietzsche made the first chapter of his *Thus Spake Zoroaster* end with a passage where Zoroaster talks with an old hermit who lives alone in the woods and spends his time " praising and praying

to God." But when Zoroaster was left alone, he spoke thus to his heart: "Is it then really possible? This old hermit in his forest has never heard the news that God is dead." It has seemed to some that the world has become very old and very wise and has shed most of its illusions, and the last illusion it has shed is that of a God who looks after men and even after the sparrows, and they would say that the shock of all the waste and misery of the war only confirmed in the ordinary mind what science had already discovered—that the world is ruled by impersonal blind laws. That is the news that God is dead.

Our setting up of this memorial in our chapel is a denial of all such gloomy doctrines; it is an assertion that all this apparent failure and waste has that in it which gives us a greater assurance and faith in God our Father. What are our reasons for that denial?

Let us first recognise that there are some views of God, some forms of so-called religion which the war made impossible. The doctrine of the Fatherhood of God has sometimes been interpreted to mean, not only that we are the children of God, but that we are his spoilt children, that he and all this great world exist for our peculiar and sole benefit; as though the famous first answer of the Shorter Catechism might be rewritten as, "God's chief end is to glorify man and make him enjoy himself for ever." In our prosperity and security before the war we were tending to adopt a religion that forgot or pretended to forget all the real terror and hardness and misery of life, as though we could not believe in the fatherhood of God without believing that somehow the sparrows did not fall to the ground after all. That ancient and highly respectable sentimental religion so ably defended by Job's comforters flourished among us. Need we re-

gret that that kind of religion has been made impossible by the war, and that if we believed in God only because we had resolutely shut our eyes to the suffering of others, or that if, like Mr. Byends of Fairspeech, we have been "zealous when religion goes in his silver slippers and not in his rags," then the war will have left us atheists?

Such views of religion are all forms of loving what is spiritual for what we hope to get out of it of things material, and that is not loving God at all. Time and again the great revivals of religion have come when the rewards and advantages which men hoped to get from the service and worship of God have been taken away; when men have lost the evidence of God working in the external world and have been driven back to find God where he must first be found if he is to be found at all—in their own hearts.

Failure can be and has constantly been

a great religious inspiration. For the law that he that loseth his life will save it is as true of religion as it is of life. The Gospel story begins with Christ's refusal to conquer the world by the world's own means, by his giving up all the ordinary external means of success which could be used only at the expense of his soul. To those who have done that there has come in their deepest sense of helplessness the assurance that God is on their side.

There are those who would object that that is indeed evidence of man's unconquerable mind, that the sublimity and wonder of man's nature are never so clearly seen as when he pursues with a single heart and without counting the cost purposes to which the world seems indifferent; but that when in his lonely and heroic fight he comes to believe in God, to feel assured that the victory is already won, that what he does is not done by him but by an infinite

power of which he is but the instrument; all such beliefs are but a last illusion, a pathetic fallacy produced by the intensity of human experience. All heroic fighting tends to produce automatically the conviction of victory, but that conviction is often disappointed. The really brave man is he who can both fight and not cheat himself with hopes for which there is no evidence. Man's spirit, they would say, is seen in its most exalted form when he can devote himself to a cause that is so entirely beyond himself and the nature of things as we see them that it is doomed to failure; when he has no illusions that there is a God who will infallibly insure him victory. That alone is a free man's worship.

Well, it is true enough that the noble devotion and self-regardlessness of the kind that we are commemorating to-day do give evidence to demonstration of a spirit in man which in a purely naturalistic world

would be a splendid miracle, of an indubitable world of values which to the natural man of Thrasymachus and Hobbes and to the economic man of the nineteenth century is foolishness. That is a plain and simple fact that must move even the indifferent spectator. We may deny God and yet pause before that denial of the divine spirit in man that is the deepest irreligion. If a man believe not in his brother whom he hath seen, how can he believe in God whom he hath not seen? For this reason at least our War Memorial was bound to be set up in chapel, a monument of a convincing vindication of the true basis of all religious faith.

But those who say that the heroic man's faith in God is but a snatched-at illusion, a wilful blinding of himself to the facts in the excitement of his struggle, have little understanding of the nature of a good man's assurance. These words of Christ as to the

sparrow that falls to the ground are the expression of a calm, simple, matter-of-fact certainty, because they come from one who has lived so continuously in that world of the spirit which all heroism partially reveals, that he has, as it were, a second sight for its laws and evidence as natural and continuous as the seeing of the eye. There is a sense in which the saints of God feel themselves up against a hostile, indifferent world. But the hostility and indifference are gradually known to be no unchangeable, relentless elements in the universe, but ones that yield to the alchemy of the spirit. The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them. But it will be that only because they are citizens at the same time of another world, the world of their fellows, of human companionship and mutual bearing of burdens. And from that sure vantage-ground they come like Job to a different and deeper understanding of the world in which the

sparrows fall: the wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them. The more they live in that world of spiritual values and submit to its laws and learn its discipline, the more they become conscious that the strength that sustains them is not their own, that they and their fellow-members of that kingdom are a cloud of *witnesses*. The sublime spirit and exalted devotion of the martyr and the hero is not a miraculous isolated appearance in an alien world. It is the fruit that springs from this very world, the world of us all when it is enriched by countless unremembered acts of kindness and of love, of the devoted but obscure lives of generations of ordinary men and women, who have felt themselves sustained and inspired in their common life by the power of God. Of that assurance there can be no intellectual demonstration. It cannot be proved from outside, but it can be abundantly tested from within. The most un-

sparing and relentless statement in modern literature of the problem of the evil and pain of the world, the long speech of Ivan in Dostoievsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, is followed by no direct answer and countered by no direct arguments. But in the next book the old monk tells the story of his conversion, of how it came from his suddenly recognising his relation to his fellow-men, from coming to see that, as he says, each is responsible for all. What we are commemorating here is not simply human daring and exaltation, but devotion and self-forgetfulness which was the fruit of human fellowship, and of the assurance and hope in God which such fellowship brings with it.

They that put their trust in him shall understand the truth, and such as be faithful in love shall abide with him.

# III

# THE YOUNG MAN WHO HAD GREAT POSSESSIONS

# III

## THE YOUNG MAN WHO HAD GREAT POSSESSIONS

"And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God. Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother. And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth. Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me. And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions."—Mark x. 17–22.

"And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and

have not love, it profiteth me nothing."—1 Cor. xiii. 3.

THE young man who had great possessions is a character on whom, I think, we ordinarily look down. The general upshot of the story, as it sticks in our memory, is that he was set a test by Christ and failed to come up to it. So engrained is our habit of reading the Gospels in the light of nineteen centuries of Christianity that we take for granted that if we had been in his place, we should have known, without any kind of doubt or hesitation, that this astounding demand made to us by an obscure wandering teacher was the veritable voice of God. We should have known it to be such, and we assume that the young man must have known the same. That being so, we think of him as a young man who had the rare good fortune of being told on infallible authority that there was only one thing he lacked, and did not act up to the knowledge.

And in the light of that assumption we look down on him, and perhaps not unjustly. For the war showed that most men, certainly most young men, will give up everything to a call of duty which is absolutely simple and certain.

To think like that about the young man is entirely to misjudge him. We don't, for that matter, know for certain that his failure was final; we don't know that he did not come back. What we do know is that this rich, well-brought-up young man was suddenly moved to come to Jesus (he came running and kneeled to him: he was clearly in a spirit of enthusiastic admiration); that he put to him this astonishing question, What was he to do to inherit eternal life?; that Jesus, when he had heard what he had to say, "beholding him loved him," and thought him worthy of the highest of all calls; that the young man was filled with sorrow because he did not

at once feel able to meet the entirely unexpected demands made on him by this new teacher, the beauty and dignity of whose words and actions had so deeply impressed him, and that Jesus thought it an extraordinary and notable example of the deceitfulness of riches that this young man did not at once respond to the demand.

What brought the young man to Jesus? He was rich and he had been well brought up. His home had clearly been one where the possession of riches was not allowed to obscure the sense of obligation and duty. There is no word or suggestion in the story of the selfishness or insolence which sometimes goes with great wealth. His parents had been godly Jewish parents, and they had brought him up in the law. He had applied himself diligently and conscientiously to the duties of his station. He must have been like St. Paul, who "profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in

mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers," and said that he was, "touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless." But somehow he had come to feel this conscientious, busy life singularly unsatisfying, and when he came to know something of Jesus, he felt that here was a man who had a secret of which he understood nothing, whose life was stayed on something far deeper than was his. *His* life was frittered away on a round of petty obligations. When they were all fulfilled, they seemed to come to very little. This man had something which was concerned with the eternal, and that was the only thing which could satisfy him.

Notice that Christ does not despise this morality of "my station and its duties." His immediate answer to the young man's question is, "Thou knowest the commandments."

Jesus was known as the friend of publicans and sinners, the disreputable elements of the society of his time. He was also known as the consistent enemy of the representatives of respectability, the Pharisees and the Sadducees. He did think that the sins of complacent and intolerant respectability were far more deadly to the human spirit than sins of intemperance and weakness. But no one knew better that the spirit of freedom and creativeness in conduct demanded submission and self-denial. The originality and the freedom of Jesus' life did not rest on any contemptuous disregard of moral or political obligation. He came, he said, not to destroy but to fulfil the law. The revolution he was effecting lay not in his seeing less in the law and commandments than the teachers of his time, but in his seeing far more than they saw or were prepared to see—in his profound and impassioned belief that through the laws and regulations of

his people could be seen the veritable laws of God, "that were not born to-day nor yesterday, that die not and none knoweth whence they come." And the law seen so, looked not *at* but *through*, seen not as a fixed form but as a living embodiment of the spirit that had inspired it, became at once something less outwardly exacting, but more profoundly and inwardly compelling; something that could never be fulfilled by any meticulous observances, but only by a constantly renewed understanding and interpretation. Only so could human laws make possible the life and more abundant life that was Jesus' inspiration; and it is creative spirit in Jesus that made him so constantly alive to the dangers of any self-satisfied, unthinking acceptance of set ways of life or systems of rules and responsibilities. He is always warning his hearers against "the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches." Nothing is further removed

from the spirit in which he lived than the pomposity that sometimes goes with a great position. He knew how easily men come to attach an entirely unreal importance to the machinery of life, especially when it becomes at all elaborate, how they come to enjoy ceremony and show and the feeling of being busy, until they forget the simple human purposes for which alone all the machinery of organised life exists. He saw how the organisation which is meant to bring men together is often used to divide men, and makes them forget that their unity as brothers and sons of one Father is far more than the difference of the parts they play in the organisation of society. He loved the young man because he saw that he had none of that complacency which great possessions and respectability so often engender, and that he had begun to feel that a man's life is not in the abundance of the things that he has, nor of the duties

he performs, and that he had still to learn how to inherit eternal life.

Jesus told the young man that he was to give up life as he had so far known it, to sell what he had and give to the poor and follow him, share the life of a man who did not know from day to day where he would lodge, form one of a small company of men, most of them of humble origin, who had given up their business to share his wandering life.

That meant, of course, immediate sacrifice and renunciation, and Jesus knew that it did. Take up the cross and follow me, was part of what he had to say. But Jesus is always far from preaching renunciation for its own sake. The young man had come to him wanting something, and Jesus saw that he wanted it, and showed him how to get it. He is to have treasure in heaven. He was dissatisfied with the life he had lived so far, and Jesus knew that he would

go on being dissatisfied with it. The fact that he had come to Jesus with this question showed that. The only hope for him was to believe enough in the spirit that had moved him to come to follow its guidance all the way, and, like the man in the *Pilgrim's Progress*, " to put his fingers in his ears and run on, crying, Life, Life, Eternal Life."

We, when we come to ask the question that the young man asked, are not likely to fall into the mistake of thinking Christ's advice in its literal form a universal recipe. To some troubled minds, very much oppressed with the cares of this world, there is a certain attractiveness in the thought of giving up their worldly responsibilities once for all by a decisive act. But we know that we cannot assume either that we shall be, or that we cannot possibly be, called upon to do as this young man was told to do. What we can and do know is that we should sit loose enough to our small worlds

of enjoyments and cares and occupations to hear and obey the call to fuller life when it comes, whatever it may be.

St. Paul, after having been brought up very much as this young man, had abandoned everything when Christ called him. But he never thought that the renunciation involved in discipleship was what mattered. "Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing." The great hymn to love in the thirteenth chapter of the first epistle to the Corinthians is St. Paul's account of the principle behind what Christ did for those who came to him. For if we think about the wonder of Christ's life as it struck the people he lived amongst, as it struck this young man, and Nicodemus, and the woman of Samaria, and many others, we can see that it lay in the obvious possession by him of a power and an insight and a sympathy

that knew no limits of race, of upbringing or position. Undeterred by diversities and inequalities, it acted like a rod in the diviner's hands to mark infallibly the presence of an element of true humanity in all men. His power in levelling all men in regard to all that was superficial and passing, exalted them all in the fuller consciousness of a universal heritage. St. Paul saw that in the light in which Christ regarded men, circumcision or uncircumcision, freedom or servitude, the tongues of men and of angels were nothing if they lacked the love of God and of their fellow-men. They became new creatures in realising their possession of that common sonship *without* which everything else was as nothing, and *with* which they possessed so much that beside the barrenness of mere outward possession they seemed to possess all things.

The society in which we live differs from the society which we find described in the

GRADUATE UNIVERSITY



Gospels, above all in its prodigious mastery over material wealth. We all of us belong and must belong to a vast economic organisation which covers the whole world. We can do nothing in life without using some existing organisation, ready-made, with cut-and-dried responsibilities and obligations. What wealth did in some degree for a few men in Christ's time it does for all of us now, rich and poor alike. We are continually using our fellow-men without entering into any kind of real human relationship with them; even our charities can become organised and impersonal. The machinery of life dominates life. We are impressed into its service from our earliest years. The result of this is that Christ's warning words about the deceitfulness of riches, his statement, "how hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God," apply to us all, whether we are richer or poorer than the average. The young man's

riches Jesus bade him leave because riches were what cut him off from the true sense of brotherhood and sonship, the beauty of which he saw in Jesus, from the dignity of the great common heritage of life and death, before the mystery of which so much of worldly life seemed trivial and unreal. And in this life to-day, when we draw upon so many results of human labour and endurance with so little need to rub up against the human lives involved, when, so far as real human relationships are concerned, we often live in the smallest of circles, we may well look again to the life of Jesus and ask ourselves whether in this civilisation of ours, with its misunderstandings and bitternesses as between nation and nation, and class and class, there is not one thing we lack if we would inherit eternal life.

Maybe the young man of the Gospels one day left his riches and joined the disciples of Jesus, but even as the story stands, there

must have been many a man and woman of those amongst whom his path lay who had cause to bless the fact that he had come, that he had known that he needed something more than to keep the commandments, and that beside a greater humanity than his own he had felt with sorrow his own incompleteness.

And I think that as we go on our various ways in life, even though we may in this generation seldom be clear where will lie the exact solution of our problems, or the healing of our divisions, we can feel we are taking one sure step in the direction of a truer and more satisfying life, if we desire whole-heartedly to use our imagination and sympathy towards widening our understanding of our fellow-men; we can gain something of that power amongst men which came to Jesus because in all their afflictions he was afflicted—because he had love and because he had pity.

# IV

# THE PROMISE OF POWER

# IV

## THE PROMISE OF POWER

"Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that ye shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."—Matthew xviii. 19–20.

THESE verses are among the most familiar in the Gospels. The promise contained in them has been cherished by the Christian community from the earliest times. The more that Christian men and women found themselves a weak, insignificant band face to face with a hostile world, the more they have felt that when they came together in the name of their master, his presence and his power were with them. They taught that all their coming together

should be in the name of Christ, and should so be able to claim the presence and the power of God behind their requests. We repeat at evening service the familiar adaptation of these verses in the prayer of St. Chrysostom: "Almighty God, who hast given us grace at this time with one accord to make our common supplications unto thee: and dost promise that when two or three are gathered together in thy Name, thou wilt grant their requests . . ."

But the promise and its explanation have suffered often a fate common to familiar things, and perhaps especially common to the familiar things of religion. They have been taken for granted; they have been cited so often that their meaning has been unnoticed and forgotten; they have been repeated and not believed. To some extent they have lost all their real meaning because men have succumbed to a danger always near at hand in religion, and turned them

into magic. We sometimes almost think that these verses mean that there is something of peculiar and mysterious power in our mere coming together with the name of Jesus on our lips, or that there is a promise attached to what we ask when we are in church. And the transformation of these verses into magic has helped to make us forget their meaning more than ever, for the magic has become, as magic always becomes, dead magic, performed but not believed. Look at the subtle change which has already come over the promise even in the beautiful prayer of St. Chrysostom. Jesus—Jesus as the Gospels describe him—tells his disciples that if any two of them agree in anything they shall ask, it shall be done for them of his Father which is in heaven, and adds as an explanation, and surety, but also as a limiting condition of that astounding promise, that when two or three of them are gathered together in

his name, he, Jesus, will be in the midst of them. We now say, "Almighty God . . . who dost promise that when two or three are gathered together in thy Name, thou wilt grant their requests." Never mind for a moment the theology and any equational substitutions which theology might justify, but ask yourselves whether it feels the same to be gathered together in the name of Almighty God or in the name of Jesus of Nazareth. We have put the emphasis on the power and might, and forgotten what can bring it to birth for us, and have come almost to suggest that if we come together in the name of power, we shall have the power of God behind us. That is what I mean by belief in magic, I mean the belief that there is some easy formula or rite or word by which, without deserving or working for it, we can have what we want given to us. That is something we do not really believe, and we would not dare to act as if we did

believe it; and so we add a condition of our own, a condition entirely unattached to Christ's promise, " as may be most expedient for us."

If you play about with unreality in that way, you pay the inevitable penalty. If you think of religion as a sphere in which unreal miracles ought to happen, sooner or later you think of and experience it as a sphere where nothing happens. The unreality which attaches itself to so much of our religion is the Nemesis of that attitude. If we expect from religion what nothing can or ought to give us, we miss the wonderful and miraculous things it can give us, and our churches come to deserve the satire of Samuel Butler's account of the musical banks of Erewhon.

Let us, therefore, ask ourselves what the promise contained in these verses really does mean, consider whether it is a promise we are prepared to take advantage of, and

then ask whether we do believe and have reason to believe that it will be fulfilled.

The best commentary on these verses is given in the story of the request of the sons of Zebedee, described in the tenth chapter of St. Mark's Gospel. The sons of Zebedee come to Jesus asking that he shall do for them "whatsoever they shall desire." It reads as though they had heard the promise of our text, had been thinking about it and had now come to put it to the test. There were two of them, and they had agreed on what they were going to ask. Jesus asks them what it is they want, and they reply, "to sit, one on thy right hand and the other on thy left hand in thy glory." Jesus asks them if they are prepared "to drink of the cup that I drink of, and be baptised with the baptism that I am baptised with," as though that were the condition or price of the glory and reward for which they were asking. When they say they are prepared,

they are told that they can share Jesus' cup and baptism, they may pay the price, but assurance that they will get the glory is not a thing which Jesus can grant them.

It looks as though the promise had been tested and had failed. The other disciples were so much of the same spirit as James and John that they were angry with them for trying to steal a march on them even though they had been unsuccessful. But Jesus explains how entirely they had misunderstood his spirit and what he meant by "in my name." If they had been together in his name, they would have understood that "whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give his life a ransom for many," and they would never have thought of asking for what they did.

The second of the verses of our text is

then not simply a guarantee but a condition —or rather perhaps it is a statement of what we must with our whole heart desire if it is as Christ's disciples that we agree together. For if we are his disciples, surely what we most must ask and want is his presence among us. Christ's promise is that if we want that, we shall be given it, that with his presence we shall have his power—a power based on the same conditions and of the same nature as was his; and that we can ask in the way that will give us this power when two or three of us come together in his name.

There is no room for magic in that promise. It is a promise that our desires will be real and compelling if they can be summed up in the desire to have Jesus present with us, with the kind of power he had when he was on earth, and without the kind of power he was then without. Jesus is not an external power who will give us what we

want apart from or without thought of the Spirit of Christ. If we are inclined to think in a disillusioned way of the myriads of times in which we and other Christians have asked for things in Christ's name and not had our requests granted, we should ask ourselves how often our requests have been even compatible with asking that Jesus should be among us; how often, indeed, we should have been profoundly disappointed and angry if his presence had really been the result of our prayers. There are many things we do and ask in the name of Jesus at the realisation of which Jesus would be very much in the way. This promise is a promise to disciples who want the presence of their master above everything else, and none of us is more than a faint-hearted disciple at the best. We have most of us a natural desire for power, but do we really want the kind of power that Jesus had? For no one ever so whole-heartedly refused

the ordinary means of power as he did. He seems never even to have thought of riches or authority, or any one of all the various ways in which we can dominate our fellows. "Whosoever will be great among you shall be your minister." That is a lesson which it is very hard to learn. But it is the lesson we must learn if we are to make any effort to be followers of Christ. We can only have his power on its own terms and conditions; we have to be ready to set the same valuations on the different things in life as he set; learn to disregard as he did merely external greatnesses and pomposities of the world, which are perhaps more insistent and compelling in our age than they have ever been. We must be prepared to be, from the point of view of these kinds of greatness, as Christ was, a failure.

We are to come together in his name. What do the last three words mean if they do not mean a magic formula? In one of

the parables Jesus answered that question. "Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered and fed thee? or thirsty and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger and took thee in? or naked and clothed thee? or when saw we thee sick or in prison and came unto thee? And the king shall answer and say unto them, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

We are doing things in Christ's name whenever we are simply and sincerely serving others, whenever we are really inspired by the spirit behind the words, "the least of these my brethren," or "whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant."

The last and perhaps the most noticeable thing about the promise in the text is that it is not a promise to isolated individuals but to a group, to men who have been brought together, who are unitedly following in the

way Christ pointed out, who are comrades and partners in the service of others.

With this in mind we sometimes, I imagine, read the "two or three" of this passage as though its whole meaning were "*even* two or three," that Christ's presence would be with even the smallest group, though of course he would be present with greater force and power when great numbers of men united in his service. There are moments when a spirit of devotion to a common cause of service seizes on masses of men, and a moving and powerful experience it is. We may many of us have been present at a great service or meeting where we have been part of a multitude of men and women truly waiting upon God, and been wonderfully moved and exalted by it. But impressive and stirring as such experiences are, it was not, I think, of such that Christ was thinking. He was thinking of his own small band. In the desperately

short time that he had to do his work, he spent most of it, not in swaying and inspiring masses of men, but on his few chosen disciples. For being brought together in Christ's name does not mean merely meeting together or being inspired by mass emotion; it means coming to that unity of mind and spirit and purpose which only the intimacy and common experience of a small group can produce. There is nothing, Christ tells us, which such a group cannot do. They have, as no other organisation can have, the power of God behind them. History abundantly bears that out. It was the Twelve and not the multitudes who heard Christ who made the Christian Church; it was Francis and his companions who made the Franciscan movement. At the back of all the great movements which have profoundly affected history will always be found a small band of men who are of one heart and mind in a common service, and

the movement keeps alive and fruitful so far as it manages to produce and inspire innumerable groups of that kind.

We are continually faced nowadays with world-wide or nation-wide problems, and we must of necessity have world-wide or nation-wide organisations. The pressure of that necessity tends to make us feel that we do nothing unless we do it on a grand scale, unless we are part of a great movement, evangelising the world in this generation, bringing about socialism in our time, or perhaps saving the world from it, or making the world safe for democracy. Such great organised movements are necessary and devotion to them is an honourable service. But if we treat them as ends in themselves, if we get so taken up with them that we neglect our personal life, or forget the common life which should inspire such organisation, and for whose sake they should exist, the life and freedom and creativeness

go out of us and out of them. Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty, and the spirit of the Lord can only be in individual men and women, and in their common life.

The message of these verses is one to which this College can bear witness, and which it also needs constantly to remember. We have in our time here opportunities of intimate friendship which we may never have again in quite the same degree. We are members of a society which has a strong tradition of corporate life and corporate patriotism. But the distinctive features of that corporate life of ours have always been the free play that it has given to individual capacities and talents and opinions, and the conviction which has inspired the College at its best, that it exists to serve others, and must be alert and eager to understand and respond to the claims and needs of all our brethren. We have known what St. Paul meant when he said there are diversities

of gifts but the same spirit, and differences of ministries but the same Lord. Men from this College have in the past done signal service to their day and generation because they have become here members of a band of friends inspired by a common purpose of service, and have, to the extent to which they have been so inspired, realised the power which these verses promise.

That is a great tradition, but it is a tradition which we do not automatically inherit and can easily dissipate. We need not pretend that we have been always faithful to it, that we have not thought of the College as existing to serve our personal ambitions or its own collective pride, that we have not grasped at the wrong kinds of power, that we have whole-heartedly wanted to be a society in which the spirit of Christ was really present.

Yet whilst in a small society inspired by the spirit of Christ there is miraculous

power, there is none in a small society as such. On the contrary. Friends are one thing and a clique is another. Nothing can be narrower or more petty than a small society whose members seek mainly personal ends or are mainly inspired by personal or collective pride. If our society is to be a power in our lives and in the world, we must keep our minds attuned to the spirit of the Gospels; we must learn to look on life in the way Jesus did; we must act and think as if we wanted his presence among us. If we do that, if we are living in that spirit, we shall find that nothing is impossible to us, and we shall feel that whenever we come together, as may be here in chapel or elsewhere, in the name of Christ, to seek renewed inspiration for our ordinary work in quietness and worship and waiting upon God, that Christ is in the midst of us.

Let us try to remember the bearing of these

words and of this promise upon the troubles of the world we are living in to-day. The war marked a break-down of our politics and our diplomacy. Prayers did not save us from that.

A seething industrial unrest marks a break-down of our industrial civilisation, a moral and emotional unrest the break-down of our religious teaching and institutions. No doubt breaks have occurred before and have been retrieved. Yet the height of our achievements in organisation and mechanical complexities adds a luridness to our failure—the luridness of the fatal ship-wreck of some modern floating palace of luxury.

How can we seem to have achieved so much and yet have failed so tragically? Is there not one common cause of failure underlying our political and social and moral catastrophes? Are we not witnessing that decay of organisations and of pro-

cedures which comes about when forms created by spirit, and shaped for the expression of the power of spirit in life, are renewed and multiplied and elaborated with no corresponding renewal and development of the spirit that gave them a glorious and creative power? Such renewal of the spirit cannot be speeded up, nor standardised, nor be made a matter of mass-production.

> There is no expeditious road
> To pack and label men for God,
> And save them by the barrel-load.

And yet we are left with a better hope than that we may somehow "blunder into Paradise." For the renewal of spirit will come (and here lies our privilege and our responsibility) whenever and wherever two or three gather together in the name of Christ.

# V

# ATONEMENT

# V

## ATONEMENT

"Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also come with thee."—John xxi. 3.

IT is not more than a generation ago that the doctrine of the Atonement was assumed to be the central doctrine of Christianity. Christianity was often, indeed *is* often, represented as almost nothing but a means of salvation, of rescue, escape, or redemption, or perhaps especially forgiveness. It was thought to be the one duty of preachers to set out what was called "the plan of redemption." That was thought and spoken of as "a plan" or "a scheme." It was the Church's duty to put it before men; all men had to do was to accept it—to agree to this unfolded scheme.

That type of Christianity has made a great mark in the world. It sounded the depths and showed the heights of human nature as no other religion ever did. It has always given the men and women inspired with it a serenity, confidence and courage carrying them through all opposition, just because its good news, its consciousness of triumph, was based on a full recognition of human need and human weakness.

But where the real human needs and human experience were forgotten and the doctrine of the Atonement was set forth in a scheme of things to be understood and accepted by the intellect, where the doctrine was regarded not as an attempt to express a deep human experience but as a fact to be recognised preparatory to the experience, it came to give a view of God and of man which could only be called repulsive. The live and human sense of actual failure and weakness became a dogmatic view of human

nature as inherently evil and almost of necessity under the wrath of God.

"Original sin," say the Articles, "is the fault and corruption of the Nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam; whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth always contrary to the spirit; and therefore in every person born into this world, it deserveth God's wrath and damnation."

The Westminster Shorter Catechism deals with this doctrine of the guilt of Adam's first sin in four terrible answers:

"The covenant being made with Adam, not only for himself but for his posterity: all mankind, descending from him by ordinary generation, sinned in him and fell with him in his first transgression. The fall brought mankind into an estate of sin and misery. The sinfulness of that estate

whereinto man fell consists in the guilt of Adam's first sin, the want of original righteousness, and the corruption of our whole nature . . . which is commonly called Original Sin: together with all actual transgressions which proceed from it. All mankind by their fall lost communion with God, are under his wrath and curse, and so made liable to all miseries in this life, to death itself and to the pains of hell for ever."

This first essential part of the doctrine gives a terrible picture of an angry and wrathful God, a being really hateful, and this picture colours the whole doctrine. For the atoning work of Christ seems to assume that God's anger has to be appeased: he has to be induced to forgiveness—to let men off their punishment. He goes on demanding a full requital; though he will accept it in the sacrifice of Christ.

When the Atonement is presented in that

form (and in that form it often has been presented), it seems as though the redeeming love of Christ could save men, but not God, as though God was the one person who was beyond redemption. No wonder that men have widely revolted from that doctrine, and have denounced it as unChristian, a strange mechanical superstition!

But because men have done that, they have also tended to make light of or disbelieve in the need or the possibility of forgiveness. They have lost sight of the essential human experience which the doctrine was meant to express; they cannot see the incredibly good news which Christ did really bring to men.

I want this evening to ask you to consider for a little the account of the first great Christian experience of forgiveness: the forgiveness of Simon Peter as it is recorded in the last chapter of the Gospel of St. John. You have heard the account

of the first call of Peter in the passage which we had for the second lesson; I want to read to you, while you have that passage in your minds, the first part of that twenty-first chapter.

And now let us look at this story as though it had nothing to do with theology, and let us consider it as a simple human story.

The disciples, at least seven of them, have gone back to Galilee, and Peter says, "I'm going fishing." The rest agree and go off with him. What was in Peter's mind? That is surely not difficult to see. A modern commentator praises Peter for calmly going on with his work till his master returned. Could any interpretation be more fatuous? Fishing was not his work; he had been called to give up fishing and become a fisher of men. And in any case, was that impetuous and warm-hearted man, who had

seen his master taken and crucified, who had himself first run away and then three times denied his master, going to settle down calmly as though nothing much had happened? How can he possibly have been feeling calm about anything? Surely the meaning of these words and this action is: "Well, the whole thing is over. I was called to a great work and had a great chance given me—and when the crisis came, I failed. I ran away and I betrayed my master the very day I had sworn I would lay down my life for him."

Even if we suppose that according to the story in this Gospel we are meant to think that Peter knew that Jesus had risen—the end of Chapter XX makes it clear that XXI is not a simple continuation of XX, but may have been an alternative—even if Peter knew that the Crucifixion was not the end of all, it was the end of all for him. How could there be anything more for him

after what he had done? Jesus had called him; Jesus had singled him out from all the others; he had made that great confession of Christ and had been specially approved by his master for it; and then, in spite of warnings, when the crisis came he had entirely failed. The whole thing had been a mistake. He had better go back to the business from which Jesus had called him. It was all he was fit for—if he was even fit for that. And so, without saying any more about it, about a matter so irretrievably hopeless, so unrelievedly black in every way, he says, "I'm going to fish." There was no point in making excuses and crying out in sorrow. And the others, who had done much as he did and must have been feeling much the same, said, "We are coming with you," and off they went.

Now I think that all of us have in some degree done things that have made us feel something like that. We may not nowadays

use phrases like "guilt" or "conviction of sin," but we know when we have had a chance and missed it: when hopeful schemes go wrong because we fail at the critical moment: when the time comes through our fault or our failure that there's nothing more to be done but to recognise that one has been a failure, and that one's failure has been the cause of the failure of hopeful enterprises and great plans. We all continually see great visions of fine and splendid things that might be done—and then go and let them down. And we can all know something of the dull, hopeless despair that was in Peter's heart as he pushed the boat off that night.

"That night they took nothing." As Peter worked through that night, his mind must have been continually going back to the last time he had fished all night in that place and caught nothing. That was very different. That was before, at the begin-

ning. His mind would go back and back again, as it does at such times, to the wonderful hopes he had had, the wonderful things he had seen and experienced, and, above all, to all that it had meant to him to be a disciple of Jesus—and crash down on the top of those thoughts every time would come the realisation of what the end of it all had actually been, and what part he, Peter, had had in that being the end; in the great disillusionment and wreck of hopes; and, bitterest of all, how he had behaved to his master, how he had repaid by betrayal all that Jesus had been to him. And he must have said to himself, as one does at such times, "If only this really was two years ago: if only at the end of this long night *he* should come and ask to be put into their boat and should tell them to let down their nets and the great draught of fishes should come. If only he (Peter) could go back and be called again; if he could start

again, he would see this time that the end should be different. But, his thoughts would end up, that's a thing that can't happen. For the most obstinate fact that seems to confront us when we are faced with our own failures is that the past is past and cannot be recalled. "Things are what they are and their consequences will be what they will be." If we are lucky we may get another chance, but we may not. And even if we do, it won't be like the first chance. What we have done, although past and unalterable, is in us and terribly powerful. Because we have failed, those who come after us will not have the chance we have had. There is that terrible truth in the grim doctrine of the guilt of Adam's first sin: we don't fail to ourselves alone—others have to pay for it. And because things are inexorably so, the only thing to do, common-sense urges us, is to bow to the facts and let the past alone, and

make the best of the bad job that is left to us. . . .

So Peter must have thought that night. But he was wrong, as we are wrong when we think like that. When morning came, someone on the shore called to them and asked if they had caught anything, and when they said "No," told them to let down their net on the right side of the boat. And "now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes," and John said, "It is the Lord!"; and it suddenly came over Peter that it *was* happening again, that it had been happening again all that terrible night. And "he girt his cloak about him and cast himself into the sea," and came to his master again.

Yes, we may say, that is a very beautiful story, but it is a miracle story. Men have always told miracle stories to give themselves imaginative relief from the hard facts of life, but the hard facts of life are not

thereby changed, though they may be for a moment forgotten. When we are faced with inexorable facts of the past, with the knowledge that what is done is done and that is all about it, are we really to be expected to find comfort because a miracle happened or is said to have happened in Galilee nearly nineteen hundred years ago? If it did happen, how can that help us unless it can continually happen again, that is, unless it just isn't a miracle but a miraculous law of life? And how are we to believe that miracles happened then, if they don't happen now?

That would be a perfectly sound objection if the story ended there, but we have yet to come to the part of the miracle that mattered. It was not any more good in itself to Simon Peter as he then was to catch 153 fish than it helps us whether he caught them or not. What did matter was that he was called again: that after having

had that great chance and thrown it away, after having been called to follow Christ and having betrayed him, he was called again and given a greater commission, and that through that very failure of his—or rather through what his master did with that failure—he began to see for the first time really what Jesus was like. He got an insight into the way Jesus loved him and cared about him which he had never had before, and could not have had if he had not betrayed him, and from that came a new power. Peter after his fall and his forgiveness is a far greater man than Peter before; what was true of Peter was true of all the disciples. That wretched band who "all forsook him and fled" became the intrepid heroes of the Acts of the Apostles.

For it didn't just all happen again. What happened was from the beginning a more wonderful happening because of an insight into the power of love which nothing

but the tragedy of the Crucifixion could have given. If we could really just go back in time and start again, we have no guarantee that we should do better, and we might do worse. But when our very failure is transformed into power, that is a miracle indeed. But it is a miracle that does happen—one of which we can in our degree have actual experience. "Forgive one another," says St. Paul to the Colossians, "even as the Lord forgave you," and if we think of what forgiveness means and can do among men, we can come to some understanding of what the forgiveness of God must be.

If we read over the story of Peter's forgiveness, we can see that in the first place forgiveness has nothing to do with punishment or the remission of punishment. To try to describe it in legal terms is to travesty it. It is just the attempt to make out the Atonement as a legal transaction that has made it a repulsive doctrine. But

that is not to say that forgiveness is an easy matter and doesn't involve pain. True forgiving is not "letting off" or "saying nothing about it." We sometimes speak as though to forgive a fault should be described as overlooking it—not noticing it, making light of it. In that sense it is easier to forgive people one doesn't care about. There is a proud kind of forgiveness we sometimes exercise on men who have wronged us, as though what they did one way or another was nothing to us and there was no reason why we should notice it; it would be beneath our dignity. It seems sometimes harder to forgive the people we love, just because people we love have from the fact that we love them a power to hurt us, because we mind intensely that they should do things we think wrong. But that pain is the necessary beginning of true forgiveness. If we don't love our friend enough, if we have cared for a false idea of him, if our

affection for him has only been a subtle form of caring for ourselves, then the disappointment with the wrong our friend has done us or with his failure will only bring bitterness and separation. But if we have the love that believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things, that love will swallow up the hurt and bring together friend and friend in a new way. True forgiveness in a sense is not an act, not something you set about or are induced to do. If you love, you can't help forgiving. You can't stop it happening. But it is not, therefore, an easy matter, for if you love, your friend's failures are your failures. You have to make your own the bitterness and disappointment that they involve. It cost Jesus all that pain to forgive Peter, because he cared so much for men as they were, with all their failures and shortcomings, that he himself went through all that their failures involved. He took the sins of men upon

him, not in any mechanical or legal way, but because in all their afflictions he was afflicted.

And if forgiving is not an easy matter, neither is being forgiven. "Peter was grieved because Jesus said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me?" That grief was but the end of what it cost Peter to see what his betrayal had meant to Christ, the pain that came through seeing his action through Christ's eyes. Being forgiven is a humbling process: it means taking something to which you have no shadow of a claim or right: it means giving up that natural pride which we all have in being self-sufficient and looking after ourselves: it means surrendering ourselves to someone else. As the questions of Jesus to Peter show, it takes love to be forgiven as well as costing pain.

But out of that pain on both sides comes, as it came to Peter, an experience of renewal

and power which does not so much cancel as triumph over (and by means of) the wrong of the past. It is the one experience in which there is a full and complete solution of the problem of evil. For it is true of forgiveness, both that the whole process is a gain and that the essential condition of the triumph of good is that the intensity and reality of the evil are first recognised. The Atonement does not, as most theories do, offer a solution of the problem of Evil which suggests that Evil looked at from some queer point of view is not quite so bad as it looks.

Jesus' teaching of God was that we come nearest understanding the nature of God in looking at the purest and truest love among men, and the message of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection is that *there* is revealed, as nowhere else so profoundly, the nature of God; that God is to us as his master was to Peter; that as Jesus felt Peter's action

as though it had been his own, and through what that cost him was able to renew and strengthen Peter's love, so God is with us in our failures and our weaknesses; that however conscious we are of our own helplessness, our failures do not separate us from the love of God, and that if we will trust in God we shall find that the apparently irretrievable past can be changed to give new life instead of death.

"Nay, in all these things," says St. Paul, "we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

# VI

# SAVING FAITH

# VI

## SAVING FAITH

"Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved, thou and thy house. And they spake the word of the Lord unto him, with all that were in his house . . . and he . . . rejoiced greatly . . . having believed in God."—Acts xvi. 30–34.

WE are living at a time when ancient beliefs, or perhaps especially ancient ways of describing belief, are in process of dissolution; when to many the ordinary phrases about religious experience which were taken for granted by, and had no difficulty for the generation before us, are strange and unmeaning; when words like salvation or faith or belief in Christ are to some of us just words which we know other people use. We may recognise that

they are signs or expressions of some experience which people have, but to many they are signs of an experience which does not happen to have been theirs. When men talk of the religious experience which these words express, we easily come to think of such an experience, not only as a gift (as in a sense undoubtedly it is), but as a magical gift, which we can do nothing to acquire and which has nothing to do with the ordinary experience of life. We hear men say, "I don't deny that other people may have this mysterious experience; they undoubtedly seem to; but it is as undoubted that I don't have it, and, as I don't, religion can be nothing to me." It is as if we were all to believe in a sort of accidental or capricious Calvinism, religious experience being given to some and denied to others. So that a man should say, I am not religious, as he might say, I am not musical, with the implication that that was all there was to

it, and that it did not really very much matter.

In such a situation it may help us to go back to the record of the experience of the men and women to whom Christianity as a system was entirely unknown, and to ask ourselves what really happened to them when they passed through the experience which is described in the first epistle of St. Peter as "being called out of darkness into the marvellous light of God." I wish to consider the story of the gaoler of Philippi. He asked what he was to do to be saved; he was told, as we are so often told now, to believe in the Lord Jesus, and the end of it was that he rejoiced greatly, having believed in God. Here are all the familiar phrases, being saved, believing in Jesus, hearing the word of the Lord; but here is something more than a string of familiar phrases strung together—here is a vivid account of a real human experience. Let

us ask what the gaoler was after, and what these words which Paul and Silas spoke to him meant to him, that they were so real and arresting; and whether what happened to him had not in it something so universal that we can find present meaning in it, in spite of all our immense differences of outlook and intellectual inheritance.

What was he after? What did he mean by asking what he should do to be saved? It might be said that he was after something neither particularly moral nor particularly religious; that he was in a panic and desperately afraid. He was not only unmanned by the earthquake; he had been threatened with ruin and had started to lay hands on himself. Are we to say then, as some men say of all religion, that his desire to be saved was the outcome of selfish fear and nothing more; that he saw himself confronted with a loss of security and of all that had made life worth living, and that

it was from these fears that he wanted to be saved; that he was a much less admirable figure than he would have been if he had calmly taken his misfortunes as something to which man is incident and in Roman fashion had fallen on his sword?

There are two things against such a reading of this passage. He came with this demand to Paul and Silas after—not before—he had been saved from material disaster. They had kept him from laying hands on himself; they had shown him that his panic was unnecessary; that the prisoners were safe, and therefore he with them. He had had his material deliverance, and it was after that material deliverance that he came asking, "What must I do to be saved?" Again, if what he wanted was material salvation, why should he appeal to Paul and Silas, two wandering vagabonds whom the magistrates had scourged and

put in prison under his care? He makes his appeal to them because in this terrifying experience he had seen that they had something which he had not—a power and assurance which kept them undismayed by all that had happened to them. In spite of their scourging, their being bound in the stocks, and the earthquake, so much more intolerable to men unable to move, they were happy and undisturbed. The gaoler did not appeal to Paul and Silas as he might have to men he felt to be essentially like himself, except that they happened to be possessed of some propitiatory magic to avert disaster. The distinctive thing about them was that they did not seem to mind material disaster. He knew himself to be in the presence of power that in the contemplation of disaster was undismayed and serene. The beginning of his religious experience was that he believed in *them*. It was no ordinary expression of politeness,

but something much liker worship, when he called his two prisoners κυρεοί. Old-fashioned theology said that the conviction of sin or the sense of the need for salvation was the first working of God upon the soul. The beginning of this man's Christian experience, as of most men's, was that *conviction* of sin, of an intense need of something suddenly apprehended as immediate and real, came to him with the recognition of the goodness and greatness of spiritual power as it was to be seen in the lives of men, men as naked as men could be of all other forms of power. He came to Paul and Silas, as the disciples and the men and women described in the Gospel had come to Jesus, as men who had something he was without and something he would do anything to get. His wanting salvation was wanting to be like Paul and Silas—was a desire which was also a faith.

The beginning of religious experience

may be brought about, as with the gaoler, by terror at the slipping away of material safety, but it is not the desire for material salvation, nor is it a mysterious assurance that certain propositions are true; it is recognition of spiritual power, the reverence and admiration for such power and the desire to possess it. For it is an easy matter in this world to have been so busy while life ran smooth, so taken up with pursuit of material power or ambition or comfort, as to be quite blind to the existence of spiritual power when we come across it, or, if we are passingly aware of it, to feel no need for it, but rather resentment at the disturbance which it brings. The complacent worldly man was the despair of Jesus as the oligarchic man was of Plato. "The light shineth in darkness and the darkness comprehendeth it not." But there are moments in life when we all are susceptible to spiritual influences—when the light

shining through and transfiguring familiar things stirs us as a message. The men who first followed Jesus had nothing to make them believe in him—no authority of tradition or position—except just what he was as a human being, how he spoke and acted and the spiritual power and assurance which shone out of him. The gaoler of Philippi found something of the same thing in Paul and Silas, and if we speak of being Christians and following Christ, we can only learn to do it by coming to recognise, admire and reverence these qualities and that spiritual power whenever and wherever it is to be found. The beginning of our spiritual experience must be that we see in other lives a power that is not in our own, that we feel the need for it and believe in it. That surely is a universal experience, common to all classes and generations, however different may be the forms in which it expresses itself.

I am unjust, but I can strive for justice.
My life's unkind, but I can vote for kindness.
I, the unloving, say life should be lovely.
I, that am blind, cry out against my blindness.

As Wordsworth says in a great passage in the *Excursion :*

We live by Admiration, Hope, and Love ;
And, even as these are well and wisely fixed,
In dignity of being we ascend.

Paul and Silas told the gaoler to believe in the Lord Jesus. What did they mean by that? Negatively that the power they had was not their own. The man was not to believe in *them.* They had felt the same helplessness and need to be saved as he was feeling now. They were not to be called κυρεοί ; there was one Lord, Jesus. It was from him that the new power in their lives had come, and the gaoler must go to the same source. But what positively did they mean by it? Some writers on the rise of Christianity say that Paul was the author

of a new religion, the cult of Jesus, as though the first disciples, following a fashion which is supposed to be epidemic in the Eastern Mediterranean, transformed their love and admiration for their master into worship and deification, so that Christianity arose as the worship of Jesus, one among other instances of the deification of a hero. We are sometimes asked to go back to the Jesus of history in a sense which is not far removed from the idea implied in a Jesus cult. Look at the historic Jesus, we are told, as he is described to us in the Gospels, and believe that he is risen and alive, capable of inspiring and helping men in the way in which he inspired his followers when he was on earth, and as such the object of our worship. That is a way of regarding the matter to which a certain kind of religious sentiment may easily give rise, but it will not really bear thinking out, and it was certainly not the doctrine of St. Paul. No Jew could

ever hold a doctrine like that. St. Paul held fast to the belief that our pattern and example—that inspired our admiration and love—was no abstract quality, but a life and death, and that the life and death of Jesus was the supreme revelation of the nature of God; and that what was revealed in a pre-eminent degree in the life and death of Jesus was revealed, in a less degree, as really in all men who were moved by the spirit of God. "Our fathers did all drink the same spiritual drink," he tells the Corinthians, "for they all drank of that spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ." So the gaoler in our story, who started by believing in Paul and Silas and was told by them to believe in the Lord Jesus, finally, after hearing the word of the Lord, rejoiced greatly, having believed in God.

In the attempt to give intellectual expression to this double conviction which was

the basis of Christian experience, there was gradually developed an elaborate doctrine of the person of Christ. If we were to follow the history of that doctrine with enough sympathy to get behind the old and now inadequate forms of thought in which it found expression, we should probably be able to see how all or most of the steps of that intricate doctrinal development, which seem to lead us into an arid region very far removed from the simplicity and live experience of the New Testament, were directed by opposition to intellectual interpretations which seemed to deny one or other of the essential sides of Christian experience, which, in the theological language of the time, said that Christ was not very man, or not very God. However true that may be, if these doctrinal formulations were ever the best intellectual expression of Christian experience, they are not that now. They were based upon a meta-

physic which we have outgrown or at any rate abandoned, and it is hard for us to find any meaning in them. What is important for us is not to let their inadequacy blind us to the reality and truth of the immediate experience of which they were originally the expression. Realisation of their inadequacy may make it necessary for us to begin again at the beginning, to start where the men and women of the New Testament started. But we all can begin, if we keep our hearts and minds open to the presence of spiritual power in men's lives, the kind of power that is described in the life of Jesus in the Gospels and is to be seen in the lives of men and women to-day, if we have the will to see it. And when we see it, and contrast our own restlessness and inadequacy with the peace and assurance which it gives, let us believe in it.

Believing in it means two things. It means admiring and revering and trying

to imitate it on the one hand, but it also means trusting and surrendering ourselves to it on the other. For if we will give that power a chance—so a great cloud of witnesses assures us—we shall find that it is quite literally a power, something which can be a power in our lives, which we shall more and more find to give our lives strength and widening of purpose, and to be that which gives meaning and order to all our lives and all that we know. We shall know it as something essentially expressing itself in personal lives, and also as something which transcends the lives of us and of all men, and knowing that will be to know it as both man and God. If we are ready to believe in that sense, we shall find that religious experience is not a magical gift, granted to some and denied to others, but something to which all can have access.

The early Church built on their assurance that their Christian experience was the

key to the meaning of the world a great synthesis of thought in which all the learning of the time found its place. Their synthesis the learning and thought of our time have largely destroyed. The comparative vastness and range of modern knowledge makes any synthesis for us a much harder task, and this generation may never achieve an adequate theology. But we lose as much as we have gained if a little added knowledge of each separate part of existence makes us forget that the parts are still such as can be synthesised. And the beginning of the power to synthesise and see the world as the revelation of God is possible to us. For to observe and to believe in the power of the Spirit in men's lives is as open to us as it was to the gaoler of Philippi, and therefore the assurance and light which that belief brings may be ours also.

Believing in the Lord Jesus is simple, but it is not easy. If we really believed in the

power of the Spirit we should be very different people and make the world a very different place. But if we want spiritual power, we must commit ourselves to the power of the Spirit and to its demands upon us. We are tempted again and again to avoid the facing of our deepest needs and to try cheap substitutes which will engineer our lives for us sufficiently well and will ask less of us: to believe in money or government or organisation or fantastic theologies ancient or modern; anything whatever which will make less demands upon us than God will do. It is a temptation which exists largely because we separate in our thoughts the demands that we think could be made upon us from the power which dwells with that which makes the demands. Yet the disciples followed Jesus, and the gaoler was saved through Paul and Silas, and in the lives of men and women to-day we can, if we will, see that, having com-

mitted themselves to God, they rejoice. They are freed from weights that we too often carry with us through life, and in the strength that is given them, the yoke they have taken on themselves is easy and the burden light.

# VII

# THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST

# VII

## THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST

"Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God."—1 Peter i. 21.

I SUPPOSE that most of us would say that the doctrine of the divinity of Christ is the central doctrine of the Christian religion. At least more people would be found to take belief in or assent to that doctrine than belief in any other as the hall-mark of a Christian—perhaps be ready to deny the title of Christian to others if they could say of them, "But they deny the divinity of our Lord," or clinch the argument against a heresy by saying, "That view is incompatible with the divinity of our

Lord." The early Church in the first centuries devoted itself to a great and long-lasting elaboration of this central doctrine of the person of Christ, and we still repeat in a central place in our service the creeds which were thus worked out.

But in spite of all the insistence on the importance and essential character of this doctrine, I venture to say that for the ordinary man or woman it means strangely little. They may assent to it; they may even resist with vehemence any criticism of it; but in doing so they are often asserting their belief in the authority of the Church or the importance of tradition rather than believing in it as a living doctrine. It does not irradiate out into all parts of their personal and social life; some of you may even be saying to yourselves, "This is a curious beginning to a Sermon on Industrial Sunday. Is not this a day when we should say very little about theology? We can

hardly think of theology without thinking of our theological differences. Should we not to-day be thinking rather of our common social duties—the demands upon us which we all, whatever our views, admit; the crying need, the aspirations for a better social life that appeal to all our hearts—the practical following of Christ, not the consideration of doctrines about him?" But if we think like that about the central doctrine of our religion it can only be because it has become for us a dead doctrine. If it really is the central doctrine of our faith, it should inspire us in all our life. For if our religion is not a power and inspiration and driving force in our lives it is nothing at all, and we had better be honest and do without it. Religion is not something to be half-hearted or conventional about—above all not something to keep in a water-tight compartment or to regard as the special concern of those whose professional business it is.

And it may be worth while this morning to go back to the New Testament and see what actually happened to the men and women who first knew or heard about Christ.

The text makes it clear that these Christians are not spoken of as though they began by believing in God and then went on to assert that God whom they knew and worshipped was revealed or had become incarnate in Christ. That is the way we usually take the doctrine. But with them the process is the other way round. "By him you believe in God; because of his resurrection and glory your faith and hope is in God." We tend to begin by taking belief in God for granted, as though of course and without saying we believe in God. All respectable people do. We are like the man who said that the existence of God was the common clash of the country-side. Belief that we take for

granted is never worth very much. No tradition or education or common convention will ever give men saving faith in God. Really to believe in God is not in the least a commonplace, but a tremendous fact in life. These Christians at any rate had not come to Christ through God, but to God through Christ. What they saw or heard of Christ had made them think and feel quite differently of the world; they saw a man who had none of the ordinary means of authority or power, who went without money or established position, and who met with apparent failure and an ignominious and shameful death. And yet just because of what he was, because of what he said and did, power came from him. Men got from him such a conviction of power that they knew that he had triumphed even over that failure and death, and that made the world for them a place irradiated and ruled by the power of God. That conviction became the power

and inspiration of their lives, so that the writer of the epistle can say to them, "You who through him do believe in God." Compared with that conviction any inherited beliefs or intellectual doctrines about God were as nothing. You remember how John the Baptist sent his disciples to Jesus asking, "Art thou he that should come or do we look for another?" and how Jesus answered, "Go and tell John what ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them." There is power being poured out for all the impotent and ill and miserable and oppressed. Look at it and see.

Such was and such has always been the real evidence for Christian doctrine, and that means surely that we are to fix our minds on the life and death of Jesus as they are recorded in the Gospels, try to make

vivid to ourselves what it would have looked like if we had been there to see; ask ourselves what it would look like now if Jesus were living here in England in the twentieth century; think of the men and women whom we know who seem most obviously to reproduce something of the spirit which was in Jesus of Nazareth; and then ask ourselves whether we honestly think that the finest and noblest thing we know; honestly, so that we really want to be like that, and want to try that way of solving the problems that confront us; and ask ourselves whether we have taken the trouble to see and experience the power that comes from that way of life. For most of us the story has been so often told, it has gathered about it such a weight of tradition and elaborate theological statement, such vast and ancient organisations; it has become something which is so much taken for granted and accepted that it is hard for us to see it in its real freshness and

power. Because Jesus sought first the kingdom of God, as no one ever so wholeheartedly did, all the other things have been added to him—the authority of organisation and custom and tradition, common recognition and external success, just the things he chose in life to go without. But we are only too apt to see only the other things and miss the things that matter. If we do that, we shall neither know Christ, nor God through him.

The central fact about the experience of the early Christians was not simply that they had heard about or seen an ideal life, or had recognised what men call the moral sublimity of Christ's teaching, and had felt called upon to try to imitate him. The Church always held out against any interpretation of Christ which seemed to reduce him merely to a teacher or a pattern to be followed. That would have left out what was the essence of their experience—that in

this man was a secret of power, that to follow him was to surrender oneself to a power greater than they had known elsewhere; something so clearly different and greater than men's most determined efforts that it must be the revelation of God.

Do not let us confuse ourselves by saying, "Yes, no doubt there were all these special signs and wonders in the life of Christ, and our religion tells that they happened, though it was a very long time ago." The men and women to whom this epistle was written had not seen Jesus themselves. What should make them believe that strange story of the resurrection, and what vital difference would it have made to them if they had? They believed God had raised Christ from the dead and had given him glory, because they saw the power and life in his disciples. They had met men who were, in St. Paul's words, risen with Christ; they had seen in their lives something of the power that was

in Christ's. They had had experience of the same power in themselves, and so through him they had come to believe in God and to have faith and hope in God.

To believe in the divinity of Christ is to believe that what Christ was in his life and death is the greatest thing in the world—that there is the real secret of the power which is behind the world; and if we really believed that, we should act on it, we should try his way far more, and far more courageously than we do, and we should make the world a very different place. For if we are to take to heart the lesson of our text, we must remember that we, if we profess to be followers of Christ, must in our degree bear witness as he did to the power of God. We must ask ourselves if men are helped by us to believe in God, if we show ourselves to be so filled with life and power that men seeing us have faith and hope in God. We are bound to give evidence one way or the

other; either to help men to believe in God or to make men feel that the world is a place where greed and hardness of heart and clever cunning are the powerful things and the explanation of its working. What is true of our personal life must also be true in their various ways and degrees of our social life and our institutions. They ought to be such that they make men have faith and hope in God, that they are evidence that the men who made them and maintain them believe that the kind of life that Christ led is the greatest thing in the world; make men believe that those who trust in violence and cunning and cleverness do not understand the secret of life as well as those whose social life expresses, however inadequately and crudely, that all men are brothers and children of one Father.

We are sometimes told that the modern Labour movement is materialistic and irreligious. No one who has seen anything

of it from the inside will bear out that accusation, and perhaps we may be content to set against it the counter-accusation that it is hopelessly idealistic and sentimental. But it is true that a section of it regards the churches as organisations whose aim and purpose it is to uphold things as they are, and that a smaller section of it, in this country a very small section, professes a definitely materialistic and irreligious creed. A dull, drab and dreary doctrine it is—the doctrine that all men's actions are determined by the changes in the material means of production, that creativeness and goodness and self-sacrifice and love are illusions, that men are moved by economic self-interest and by that alone, that material conditions make men's economic interests at necessary variance, and therefore make them necessarily at war with one another. We do right to condemn such a doctrine, but the best way to condemn it is to prove it in our

actions to be untrue, and before we condemn the men that hold it we should ask who taught them a doctrine to which many of them in lives of devotion and self-sacrifice themselves give the lie; how far we ourselves, for all our very different professions, in practice have taught and continue to teach the doctrine; whether—when through the disciples' message men came to believe in God and through their exaltation had faith and hope in God—it is through us that men believe in materialism; and whether our indifference and unbelief have given men that disillusion and despair.

It is perhaps the greatest condemnation of what is called the period of the Industrial Revolution that men's minds became so much occupied with the vast increase in material wealth which they were helping to bring about that they became the slaves of the machines they created. They worshipped the work of their own hands, and invented

this grim and desperate doctrine of economic determinism; taught that men's social relations were at the mercy of the machines and organisations they had themselves created. That pessimistic doctrine was for many years the orthodox economic creed of the country, and men as individuals and in their legislation acted on it with a greater consistency than men often act on truer and nobler principles. The churches themselves were so much occupied with the thought that religion was concerned with the next world and that alone, that they were ready to abandon this world to the devil, and largely acquiesced in the position that in economic and industrial relations Christ had no business and could have no power. Read a novel like Disraeli's *Sybil*, or Dickens' *Hard Times*, or Mrs. Gaskell's *North and South*, and ask yourselves whether you could not say of some of the men and women depicted there that by the Industrial Revolution

they were being helped to believe in the devil?

Our minds are no longer, we may thank God, obsessed by that grim error, though it is still held by some who ought to know better; our legislation has long given it up, and we have most of us got as far as to see that we need the truth of our common brotherhood to be expressed in our industry as much as anywhere else; that the notion that that department of human life can do without the kind of human relationships that Christ came to spread is futile and silly. We are all talking nowadays of co-operation and pulling together. But it is one thing to know that we would be better for something and another to believe in it enough to get it. We might become convinced by repetitions of the experiences we went through last year, that methods of conflict and struggle and mastery led only to despair, and yet be far from being ready

to try the way that should come first to followers of Christ. The kinds of power which Christ did without are nowadays so all-pervading, so impressive in their magnitude that we go on being hypnotised by them, even though we can see to what despair we are reduced when we put our trust in them. And so, in spite of ourselves, we go on allowing our society to be more and more organised into two great hostile camps, each getting gradually more disciplined and regimented for conflict, each settling down to think of the conflict as inevitable; cheating itself, perhaps, by thinking that when its organisation wins, it will then remould itself after Christ's pattern. Let us remember that the greatest promise that Christ made to his disciples, was that he would be in the midst of them when "*two or three*" of them were gathered together in his name. If the Church of Christ believed in the doctrine it professes, and would believe in that

promise and act upon it, then we should know what it was to have the power of God behind us, and in our industrial relations and all our social life we should have faith and hope in God.

# VIII

# IDOLS

# VIII

## IDOLS

"Their land also is full of idols; they worship the work of their own hands, that which their own fingers have made."—Isaiah ii. 8.

THE hatred and scorn of idolatry which runs through the Bible from the second commandment to the verse in Revelation which denounces those who "worship devils and idols of gold and silver and brass and stone and wood: which neither can see nor hear nor walk," is one of the most striking features of the religion of the Jews. Israel for the prophets was marked off from other nations that worshipped idols. The God of Israel was not to be represented or worshipped in images of men or beasts. The connection of any such worship with

him was a degradation! And yet the denunciations and scorn of the prophets show how constantly and easily the Jews turned away, in spite of their traditions and commandments, from the worship of the living God to the worship of idols. Not only did they take up all too easily the religions of their neighbours and adopt their fantastic beliefs and practices; time and again they introduced images into the worship of Jehovah, which time and again some stern reformer drove out. There is a curious story in the Book of Numbers, telling how Moses was permitted to bring healing to those stricken by a plague of fiery serpents by making and lifting up a serpent of brass, so that everyone who was bitten and who looked up at the brazen serpent was healed. And the story is made in St. John's Gospel a symbol of the crucifixion. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be

lifted up." But we are told in the second Book of Kings that when Hezekiah came to the throne, " he removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan," a piece of brass.

What is the secret of this continual attraction and repulsion? What is there in human nature which makes men so ready to *worship* idols, and what is there so evil in such worship that it calls forth these indignant denunciations from one end of the Bible to the other? The question is worth asking. For it is not one which concerns only the student of the history of religion. We may be sure that this long history of attraction and repulsion is concerned with some constant tendency in man, however uncouth and strange may seem to us some of the forms which it has taken in the past;

that we nowadays are just as inclined as were the Israelites to worship idols, and that we need, as did they, to listen to the denunciations of the prophets. It is not, I think, fanciful to emphasise the distinction suggested in that verse in Revelation between two kinds of false religion—the worship of devils and the worship of idols. No honest-minded student of the history of religion, however anxious he may be to see the good embodied in different faiths, can deny the continual recurrence of the worship of evil, of the inhuman and the beastly. There is some curious tendency in man inclining him to worship what is as unlike himself as possible, or what is most evil and uncontrollable in himself. We can find the tendency in ourselves, if we lose sight of the simple realities of human life and human goodness and affection, to admire and devote ourselves to what in our hearts we know to be evil.

That is one tendency which shows itself in human nature. It is not confined to savages in Central Africa. It has its civilised forms, and we can find it in ourselves if we are honest. But though we may underrate the attraction and power of this kind of religion, though we may overlook how easy it is to "feast and make strong the many-headed monster and enslave the divinest part of ourselves to the most ungodly and the most abominable," when we do that we know what we are doing. There is not really any doubt about the evil.

The worship of idols is a religion of a more subtle falseness. It is the defect or the taking wrongly of something good. It is a far more insidious and deceptive tendency than the worship of evil. Indeed some people might contend that if we make the distinction between the worship of devils and the worship of idols, then the worship

of idols is not wrong, but in its place a valuable element in religion. We can perhaps at least admit that those forms of religion which have been most possessed by the repulsion from idol worship, Judaism, Mahommedanism and Puritan Protestantism, have lost something of value which less austere forms of religion have preserved.

"They worship the work of their own hands, that which their own fingers have made," is Isaiah's scornful summing-up of idolaters. But if men are going to hold sacred the work of their own hands, what they make will probably be more beautiful and finer and nobler for the fact. The work of men's hands, the external achievements of the human spirit, are at least more worth worshipping than many things which have been the object of human worship. A more sympathetic interpreter of idolatry than was Isaiah might give a very different account of the spirit moving it. He would

say that the idol or image was man's attempt to give outward and visible form to his conception of God and his deepest imaginings: that the idol is only a symbol of something far greater than itself: that man's desire to worship in concrete form the divine he finds within himself comes from his recognition that, though he may find God within his own heart, what he finds there is not something subjective, not the product of his own desires and imaginings, but something outside of and above and beyond himself: that if he makes a material symbol of God, something which can be lifted up as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, he can look up to it, and, looking up to it and revering it, be looking up to and revering God. We may go on and say that there is a reason why Christianity has felt repulsion to images less violently and continuously than did Judaism. For Christ taught that mercy,

pity, love are more of the nature of God than are might and omnipotence and majesty; that God is revealed more in the love of man to man than in the starry heavens above, more in the love of a mother to her child than even in the moral law within. It is therefore not wonderful that a faith which holds that God is revealed more in human life than in abstractions should, in spite of all that it owes to Judaism, give a place to art in religion which Judaism never gave, and should have in some of its forms used images in a way which either a Jew or a Mahommedan would consider idolatrous. We need not deny, whether we be Ritualists or Puritans, that it has sometimes succumbed to dangers of this tendency in religion and been in fact idolatrous.

These are controversial issues where, as is usual in religious controversy, each side is right in what it says about its own religious

experience and wrong in what it says about the religious experience of its opponents. In any case I am not concerned with the controversy, but rather to point out how deep into the double nature of religious experience any consideration of idolatry at once takes us. Ritualism and Puritanism, Sacramentalism and anti-sacramentalism, immanence and transcendence, and the opposition between what the Germans call a This-sidedness doctrine and an Other-sidedness doctrine—these age-long controversies are concerned in different ways with the proper balance between two elements, each of which is vital to religion. God reveals himself in man, and we are called on to show forth God not only in our religious symbols but in our lives and in all the work of our hands—our art and literature and our social and political institutions. Unless we learn to reverence the divine in ourselves and in our fellows, in

great art and in all the concrete achievements of the human spirit, we shall not find God elsewhere. "He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" If, in protest against the inadequacy of the revelation of God in such visible ways, we shut off from our religion such revelations, think that it is concerned with the soul and not with the body, with preparing men for the next world, not with making a better place of this one: with what is called sacred because it is not secular art, with hymns and not with poetry, we shall find ourselves worshipping an abstraction. Our religion may then easily grow as hard and cruel and dead as abstractions often are, and our ordinary world, if it is not to be a world in which God is to be found, will certainly become a place where the devil is found instead.

At the same time we in this generation

have no great need to be warned against the dangers of Puritanism and of other-worldliness. These are not the sins that easily beset us. We are always being told and we readily believe that there is no sharp division between the sacred and the secular, that religion is concerned with the whole of our ordinary life. We are suspicious of hard-and-fast distinctions; we are not easily inclined to think that our eyes or our feet offend us and should be cut off lest we be cast into hell fire. We have probably, therefore, something to gain in understanding the reasons for the flaming hatred of idolatry which runs through the Bible. Isaiah was not merely an intolerant fool; he knew and had experienced what the evil of idolatry was.

This is the frame of mind out of which he thinks idolatry comes. "Their land is full of silver and gold, neither is there any end of their treasures. Their land also is

full of horses, neither is there any end of their chariots. Their land also is full of idols." Idolatry is the sin of the prosperous and complacent, of men who have by the work of their hands, or more often by the work of their fathers' hands, done well for themselves, have got a secure position, have now no need for desperate struggle and need no longer ask fortune or other men for mercy. Their own hands have made them independent of God or of other men. When they worship their idols they are really worshipping themselves. They forget the desperate hazards of former times, when the foundations of their prosperity were being laid, the inspiration through which their first successes came, the humility which goes with all real creative action. They take their comfortable and assured prosperity for granted. If they are to have a religion at all, they will use what religious feelings their wealth has left them, in adoring

and reverencing their position and themselves. We, who are heirs of a long tradition of prosperity and success, know that spirit, how all-enveloping its atmosphere can be, how hard it is to resist. We have a great inheritance—of long-continued wealth, of civil liberty and freedom, of all kinds of noble institutions. They were built up mostly in a spirit of creativeness and of humility. Far more goodness and divinity went to their making than the iconoclasts whom our idolatry provokes will often allow. But we who inherit them can only too easily take them for granted, worship the achievements and be entire strangers to what divinity went to their making. When we do that we treat such achievements as idols.

But the sin of worshipping the work of our hands, though it may most surely go with that insolent complacency which established wealth and comfort and success some-

times bring, has its subtler and more insidious forms. The great tradition which Christianity inherits from Judaism, and which is the secret of the Bible's denunciations of idolatry, is that of the infinity of God. That is as much the message of the New Testament as of the Old. Notice how St. Paul, for all the immanence of some of his doctrine, uses phrases like "the *unsearchable* riches of Christ," "the love of Christ which *passes knowledge*," "I count not myself to have apprehended." If we have learnt anything of that message, we shall always be sensible of the inadequacy of the best we can do, of our best thoughts about God, and of our most devoted actions. We shall never be content with accepted standards or acquired formulæ. We shall keep our eyes open to new possibilities and new demands which God may make upon us. We shall be on our guard against resting content with what we have done. We shall understand why

humility is a Christian virtue. Only if we live in that spirit shall we escape worshipping the work of our own hands.

The Bible insists that when we are worshipping idols we are worshipping something which is bounded and lifeless. "The idols of the heathen are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths but speak not; eyes have they but they see not; they have ears but they hear not; neither is there any breath in their mouths. They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them." If you really worship the work of your hands and not the spirit which inspired that work, you worship something that is dead. That is a form of religion that has great advantages. The great merit of an idol is that it will "stay put." It plays the part your imagination assigns to it. It accepts readily whatever scanty service you are prepared to offer it; it does not make inconvenient

and unexpected demands of you. You know where to find it. It can be an elegant adornment to an orderly and settled life. It can be uncovered on Sundays and remain put away for the rest of the week. That is a way in which we are all apt to treat religion—as something which no doubt has its place in life, a sphere which it is for us to settle and which can be fixed. We are prepared to give it a certain amount of consideration on the strict understanding that we settle the amount and that no further demands are made. It is to have its own defined sphere and not move outside it. It must subscribe to the doctrine of water-tight compartments, which is so fashionable in modern life. On some such understanding we are most of us prepared to be religious, and can even be indignant or shocked when other people are not prepared to recognise the obligations of speech or ceremony or action which such religion

involves. And when we act in that way we sometimes have the impertinence to complain that religion is not alive. Of course that kind of religion is not. We are worshipping idols, we have determined that the object of our religion shall be dead, and we should be very resentful if it became alive. It matters nothing whether we occupy ourselves with elaborate ritual or belong to the straightest sect of Evangelical Protestantism; it is not the symbols but what we do with them that matters. There is nothing so sacred nor so revealing of divinity or grace but that men, if they forget to beware of idolatry, may not make of it for themselves an idol. We must raise our eyes to the Son of man, as the Israelites raised theirs to the serpent, and be healed, but even of the Son of man we can make for ourselves a dead image that will have to be destroyed. It is only in the recognition of this truth and of this warning that we

can dare to see God in ourselves and in our fellows, in the work of our hands or in the heavens, the work of God's hands, the moon and the stars which he has ordained.

To turn from the worship of idols to the worship of the living God is to surrender ourselves to something not only infinitely greater but infinitely more alive than ourselves, not to a dead symbol or image which owes what life it has to our imaginings or our affections; but to something that gives greater life to us. We cannot make conditions with God—we cannot determine beforehand what God is going to do with us, but the result and the test of our surrender to God is the quickened and aroused life that we shall find in ourselves. And when men say, as some do, that all religion is idolatry, for it is all nothing but making God out of our own desires, and fears, and imaginings, and aspirations, we shall know

that that is untrue. For we shall know how God has called us, and dealt with us, and led us to things that were never in our minds or in our proposals for life. Whether we shall so find the living God depends upon the way in which we treat all the means by which he has revealed himself to men. For it is easy to treat all the several concerns of life as matters of momentary interest, caring for them only as they serve our accidental purposes or our casual desires, and thus to find that we are worshipping a host of idols, opaque and dead, telling of nothing beyond themselves; but if we seek through them to the one life which gives meaning and purpose to them all, and which unites us with our fellows in a common service, then what once were idols will become revelations of a life in which we can put an infinite trust, and in devotion to which we best can find ourselves.

For the sake of life,
For that life is dear,
The lust after life
  Clings to it fast

For the sake of life,
For that life is fair,
The lover of life
  Flings it broadcast.

The lover of life knows his labour divine,
  And therein is at peace.
The lust after life craves a touch and a sign
  That the life shall increase.

The lust after life in the chills of its lust
  Claims a passport of death.
The lover of life sees a flame in our dust
  And a gift in our breath.

# IX

# THE NATURE OF RELIGIOUS TRUTH

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### I

THERE is a passage in the *Critique of Pure Reason* where Kant, after having disproved the validity of all intellectual arguments for or against the existence of God, makes the curious remark that though he knows that the arguments on both sides are nonsense, he would always read with interest the negative but not the positive arguments. "Whenever I hear that some uncommon genius has demonstrated away the freedom of the human will, the hope of a future life, or the existence of God, I am always desirous to read his book, for I expect that his talent will help me to improve my own insight into these problems. . . . The dogmatical

defender of the good cause I should not read at all, because I know beforehand that he will attack the sophistries of the other party simply in order to recommend his own. Besides, a mere defence of the common opinion does not supply so much material for new remarks as a strange and ingeniously contrived theory. The opponent of religion, himself dogmatical in his own way, would give me a valuable opportunity for amending here and there the principles of my own critique of pure reason, while I should not be at all afraid of any danger arising from his theories."

We must all of us in reading arguments for or against the truth of religion have been struck by the remoteness of all such argumentation from the real nature of religion. The hero in Dostoievski's *Idiot*, recounting a conversation he has had in the train with an atheist, says that the curious thing about atheists is, " that they are always talking

about something else." He might have said the same of many orthodox defenders of religion. We feel of all these arguments that "we need not be at all afraid" or at all hopeful "of any danger" or any "support arising from these theories," for they are concerned with something else. They all take so little cognisance of the worship, the confidence and hope which is the essence of religious experience, that they do not seem to touch it at all. There is an amusing story of a Scotch minister who began his prayer with the words, "O Thou who art our ultimate hypothesis and our eternal hope," and the funniness of the story comes not from its incongruous mixture of the language of the study and the language of devotion, but from the essential incongruity between the experience that found God as our eternal hope and any talk of an ultimate hypothesis. Religious faith is and must be a personal and individual experience. The

natural language of preaching is not argument or appeal to historical evidence, but bearing witness to personal experience. "Come and see." "I will tell what great things the Lord has done for me." If we forget this when we come to discuss religious questions, such discussion will move in a region remote from religion and may be singularly unprofitable. Christian and Faithful, after coming out from the Valley of the Shadow of Death, fell in with one Talkative, who welcomed the proposal that they should discourse on their way. "I will talk of things heavenly or things earthly; things moral or things evangelical; things sacred or things profane; things past or things to come; things more essential or things circumstantial; provided that all be done to our profit." Bunyan puts in the margin, "Oh, brave Talkative!" and Faithful says to Christian: "Surely this man will make a very excellent pilgrim." But

Christian replies: "He is the son of one Saywell. He dwelt in Prating Row, and he is known of all that are acquainted with him by the name of Talkative of Prating Row, and, notwithstanding his fine tongue, he is but a sorry fellow."

But as the result for Kant of reading sceptical refutations of religious truths was to send him back to re-examining the principles of his critical philosophy, to looking again at his doctrine of the limits of pure reason; so for us this very impression of the remoteness from religion of all these theological and anti-theological arguments must set us reflecting on the nature of religion, and particularly on the claim of religion to have to do with truth. For it might not unnaturally be said to those who profess themselves so indifferent to the results of speculation in religious matters, who so determinedly exalt the heart above the head, that they cannot really have it

both ways. Let them insist that they know what the nature of religious experience is—that the notion that it consists in holding certain propositions to be true could only come from a complete ignorance of its nature—the logician must surely be allowed to reply that while religious experience is not his business, the nature of truth *is*: that there are certain definite and describable characteristics of the mental processes by which we arrive at truth; and that if the nature of religion is so remote from intellectual arguments as has been urged, it is thus equally removed from truth. The defender of religion may make his choice. He may repudiate intellectual arguments and abandon the view that religion is concerned with truth; or he may claim that there is such a thing as religious truth and abide by the results of the intellect. But he cannot both repudiate intellectual arguments and talk about religious truth. If he

make the first choice, this will not mean that religion is false, any more than because truth is not goodness it is evil, or because truth is not beauty it is ugly, or because goodness and beauty are not truth they are therefore illusions.

This dilemma, however convincing it may seem at first sight, will not cover the facts. For while the defender of religion will continue to insist that religion does not consist in holding propositions to be true, he will also maintain that it is an essential part of religious experience that it involves knowledge of some kind, and therefore truth, but that the knowledge and the truth are not to be found in the propositions of theology, but somehow in the religious experience itself. He is, in fact, determined to have it both ways.

Before we brush aside this claim as obviously absurd, or indeed before, by an attempted analysis of a typical religious

experience, we try to show that this double claim is actually implied in religious experience, we may do well to let the defender of religious experience ask the logician if there are not different kinds of truth, or, better perhaps, different species of a common genus : whether the difficulty does not arise because of a mistaken assumption that the only kind of truth is the truth of matter-of-fact propositions. Let the logician re-examine his logic and, leaving aside the problem of religious truth so as not to beg the question which is being examined, let him ask whether there is any sense in talking of poetic truth, and whether, when we talk of historical truth, we mean quite the same thing by truth as when we talk of the truth of a scientific proposition. If it appear from such an examination that there are different species of truth, all members of a common genus—that we can find a generic characteristic of truth in all our

examples and yet recognise their quite specific differences, then the problem of whether there is such a thing as religious truth and what are its special characteristics can be examined on its merits. The dilemma which would have estopped all discussion from the outset can be avoided if there are different species of truth. Thus it may be true that the truth of religion is a reality, but is not reached by argumentative or intellectual methods. But the logical question must be got out of the way first.

We may begin by reminding ourselves of a famous passage in Plato's *Republic* where Plato ends a discussion of the claims of poetry to truth by declaring that poetry is three times removed from truth. The claim which is examined throughout the argument is that because a man is a great poet, therefore the scientific or moral or philosophical propositions contained in his poems will be true, and the main heads of the

argument are that poetry neglects all those means of abstraction and accurate measurement which are in other spheres indispensable to the attainment of truth, and encourages the mind to dwell on those elements of experience, and to foster those emotions which are in these other spheres most prejudicial to that attainment. Plato's refutation of the claims of poetry to truth is entirely convincing so far as concerns the truth of the non-poetic propositions which poetry happens to express. Poetic inspiration is no substitute for hard thinking and accurate measurement in spheres in which such qualities are relevant. But that is not even for Plato an end of the matter. It is significant that this tenth book of the *Republic*, which begins with this unsparing attack on poetry for those "who have not the antidote of understanding its real nature," should end with a poem, the myth of Er. It is as though Plato, having done

by hard thinking and careful reasoning and impartial examination of the facts all that can be done by such means, should first emphasise that the results he has gained could have been gained in no other way, and should then go on to add the enlightenment and illumination of the kind that only poetry can give. While he was always careful to distinguish between beauty and truth, he was also convinced, as the great myth of the Phædrus teaches, that there was some essential connection between the two, and that habituation to beauty was a necessary training to the soul which was to understand truth.

If we reflect for ourselves on what poetry does for us, we must admit with Plato that the greatness of a poem is no evidence for the scientific truth of the propositions it conveys, if we treat it as a repository of such propositions, " stripped of the colours of poetry ", as Plato says, " and said just by

themselves." Most people would admit that we can learn more about human nature from reading Shakespeare than from the best books on psychology, or to put the claim as low as possible, that we can learn in this way something about human nature which no scientific text-books could teach us. We ought to add the converse truth, that we can learn from science something about human nature which we do not get from Shakespeare. We learn from Shakespeare not because he incidentally makes many penetrating and shrewd remarks about human nature in the course of his plays. He does do that, and such remarks may be and have been used as the material for psychological treatises, as they are, for example, by Mr. Shand in his *Foundations of Human Character*. But to treat Shakespeare or any other poet as a collection of wise saws or striking observations is to miss out the poetry, and with the poetry just the

distinctive kind of insight which Shakespeare can give. How exactly the poetry does this it is very hard to say. But it has something to do with the fact that as we say the poet makes us live through the scenes and characters he describes, in order to read poetry properly we must to some extent reproduce in ourselves the poet's own experience. That can only be done in and through the poetry itself. Who is a poet?

> 'Tis the man that with a bird,
> Wren or eagle, finds his way to
> All its instincts. He hath heard
> The lion roaring and can tell
> What his horny throat expresseth.

It is sometimes maintained that poetry and art generally cannot in any sense be true because they are concerned with the world of imagination, not with the world of reality. It is the case that the characters of a drama are individual characters created by the dramatist: they are misunderstood

if they are regarded as types or examples. They are individual people in the world of imagination. But it is also the case that by dwelling with and coming to appreciate these inhabitants of the world of imagination we do come to understand the inhabitants of the real world better. These characters give us insight into something of reality beyond themselves. This point is put very strikingly in a remark of Croce's, who is ordinarily regarded as the chief exponent of the view that art deals with imagination and not with reality. He is discussing and rejecting the doctrine mentioned above, that art deals with types; examples, that is, of empirical concepts, as when it is said that Hamlet is the type of the over-contemplative man or Don Quixote the type of fantastic chivalry. He answers by asking, " Of whom are Hamlet and Don Quixote types? " and by answering, " Of all the Hamlets and all the Don Quixotes."

We must first appreciate the individual Hamlet and the individual Don Quixote in the world of the artist's imagination, but when after that we turn to the real world and actual people, we find that light has been shed on them and we can understand them better because of what we have seen in the world of imagination.

The distinctive character of poetic truth has been described by the late Professor Ker in two passages in his essays on Tennyson and Browning.

"Two of the most solemn passages in all poetry are the argument of true Fame in *Lycidas* and the speech over the death of Sampson:

> Nothing is here for tears, nothing to wail
> Or knock the breast, no weakness, no contempt,
> Dispraise or blame, nothing but well and fair
> And what may quiet us in a death so noble.

"These meditations of the poet are wronged if any word is said about them in

discussion of their substance; one may argue with Milton about 'the ruin of our corrupted clergy then at their height,' but not about his poetical doctrine of true Fame:

> That strain we heard was of a higher mood.

So we may hold that the thought of Tennyson is not so well bestowed in the argumentative poems as in some of those where he uses mythology, the legends of Tithonus or the Holy Grail, to convey his reading of the world. The difference between the two kinds of thought is very great, and the nobler kind is not discourse but vision. It does not lend itself to discussion; if it is once apprehended there is no more to be said or no more than the words of Sir Bors in the *Holy Grail*:

> Ask me not, for I may not speak of it,
> I saw it."

And again:

"Wordsworth's knowledge, in which he

is eminent above all other thinkers in the world, is so essentially part of his own life, so close to reality, that it will not bear translation into any language but his own. Nothing can take its place. Abana and Pharpar will not do instead of the waters of Israel. Theories something like Wordsworth's have been expressed in prose and sometimes in phrases that seem well fitted for large advertisements; *e.g.* 'Cosmic Consciousness,' 'In Tune with the Infinite.' It looks as if Wordsworth's knowledge might be shared in part with people who not only have no poetic utterance, but no decent language at all to say what they mean. Wordsworth himself in his unfinished philosophical poem sought to give as argument what he knew as vision. But what is only known in vision can only be conveyed to other minds by some different art from logic; by the language of poetry, where poetry comes nearest to music and is furthest from

prose; which does not mean that Wordsworth's knowledge is simply feeling, but that it is different from the intelligence that argues and explains."

If now we ask what there is in common between the truth of poetry as so described and the truth of a scientific proposition, we can answer that both the poem and the scientific proposition are things the proper apprehension of which throws light beyond themselves for the proper understanding of reality. It is surely obvious that nothing can be true or for that matter false except that which has a reference beyond itself, which tells us about something other than itself. As the particular meaning when apprehended helps us to understand or gets in the way of our understanding other than that particular reality better, the poem or the scientific proposition is true or false.

No doubt the differences between the truth of a scientific proposition and of a poem are

obvious enough. A scientific proposition has a definiteness and precision of meaning that a poem cannot have. If the former is properly apprehended, it is seen to imply that under such and such circumstances such and such will be observed, and the implication can be tested by a definite experiment. The scientific proposition implies what we may call a standardised apprehension—its meaning can be precisely indicated—and it involves for the testing of its truth a standardised and precisely indicated observation. The meaning of the poet is only apprehended in so far as we can reproduce in ourselves something of the poet's experience, and that is not something we can standardise. The poem has no defined and precise reference to any isolable particular elements in reality. If the scientific proposition directs a pencil shaft of light at reality, poetry rather sheds a diffused illumination. We may say that the poetry

has meaning, but we cannot say what the meaning is apart from the poem.

It might indeed be contended that even if this claim be allowed, that poetry may give us insight into or shed illumination on reality, the difference between this and the meaning of truth in scientific propositions is so great that nothing is served by using the same word truth in both cases. Truth should be kept for the scientific propositions, and a word such as insight or illumination be used for what we get from poetry. Yet that this would be against the more ordinary use of language can be seen if we examine different senses in which we use the word truth in relation to history.

The propositions occurring in history, unlike those occurring in poetry, do claim to be true. It is the historian's business to be accurate, to have a scrupulous respect for fact. The truth of his several propositions cannot, like the truth of the scientist's, be

tested by experiment; but the implication of his propositions is much the same—that if we could have been present at such and such times and in such and such places we should have seen or heard such and such. But the historian's task is not ended with the accurate collection of facts. We all know that a history may contain nothing but accurate statements of fact and yet be as a whole misleading and untrue. I remember seeing in the spring of 1921 two newspapers' posters on which was inscribed "The Truth about Ireland." The facts recorded in each paper were probably in themselves true, but the contradiction between the newspapers arose from each asserting that a different set of facts was "the truth about Ireland." From the one paper one would have gathered the impression that Ireland was a place where nothing happened except outrages committed by Sinn Feiners; from the other that nothing happened but outrages

committed by Black-and-Tans. Sinn Feiners and Black-and-Tans were committing outrages, and a truthful account of Ireland at the time would have had to take account of both sets of facts and of much more. The important question was the significance or value to be attached to the facts.

We all know that the historian has to select his facts. But it is sometimes supposed that this selection is a mark of human infirmity; that his ideal is to give all the facts, that is to make history like Sylvie and Bruno's map, which was to be of the same scale as the country. The history of a year which included ten thousand and one facts would on this showing be truer than a history which only included ten thousand, which is nonsense. History is possible because there are not only significant propositions but significant facts. Some facts tell us more about the rest of reality than others, and it is with those and with their

relative valuation that the historian is concerned. But if you ask, Of what are his facts significant? the only answer is, Significant of reality, or at least of the period he is trying to understand and describe. Of such significance there is no precise test, as there is in archæological or documentary record of his detailed facts. The test of the historian's work is that along with fidelity to the facts he helps us to understand the period, makes it intelligible to us. It is not just that he gives us an account with which no later discovered facts are in contradiction, nor just that he puts things in their true significance with their values right, so that in apprehending and appreciating his scale of values we find through his help reality more intelligible. If he had to do only the former, his task would be purely scientific; if only the latter, purely artistic. He has somehow to do both. The first part of his work involves for its appreciation the same kind

of standardised perception as is implied in the appreciation of scientific facts; the second implies the same kind of spiritual insight, which cannot be standardised, as is implied in the appreciation of poetry.

We might go on with this examination of the different ways in which we come to understand reality better, and the different species of truth which they involve: we might point out that science is not a mere collection of scientific facts which can be tested by experiment, but involves as well the unstandardisable appreciation and the unstandardisable test of making reality intelligible as well; we might consider the difficult question of the nature of philosophical or metaphysical truth; but we have perhaps done enough to establish what is to the purpose for the discussion of the claims of religion to be true, namely, that there is a generic characteristic of truth—that is true, the apprehension of which throws

light beyond itself for the understanding of reality—and that this generic characteristic exists in different species.

But before going on to examine the specific form of truth given by religious experience, there is one lesson which we learn from the examination of scientific and poetic and historical truth, which has not yet been noticed and which it will be well to bear in mind. We sometimes talk as though science existed in laboratories and text-books, history in the printed works of historians, and poetry in printed poems. But they only exist in the minds of the scientist and the historian and the poet and of the rest of mankind in so far as for themselves or by the help of greater and more specially talented men they can become scientists and historians and poets. The specimens and the text-books, the printed words—like the musical notes—are in themselves dead: they have meaning only be-

cause and in so far as by their help we can reproduce in ourselves the living experience of which they are the product. We go wrong in this matter because, as we have seen, the apprehension of what we may call scientific matter of fact is largely standardised, and a great deal of it for the normal civilised man is realised with very little effort. We forget how much has really gone to the making even of such standardised apprehension, and think of scientific truth as though it were made by the scientist and then, so to speak, left lying about. And when we come to a kind of truth, such as is given by poetry and history, which needs a special effort to recreate and make alive in us, we are so impressed with the effort we have to make that we forget that poetry and history have standards of their own; as though anything beyond the bare facts the apprehension of which is standardised were invention, and

therefore false, and we sometimes tend to think that if those other forms of experience which claim to give us truth really do so, the claim ought to be capable of being tested in the standardised way. "There is the back drawing-room still on the first floor and still at the back of the house to confirm my words," says Flora in *Little Dorrit*, and we all of us sometimes think like that. No doubt if there were no invention and construction necessary to the discovery of truth, we should avoid error and illusion, but we can only avoid the possibility of error and illusion by giving up the possibility of truth. The humility and acceptance of mind which are necessary if we are to come to understand something of the richness and complexity of the infinite reality without us are not got by and do not issue in sitting still and doing nothing. They require and they lead us to intense but disciplined activity.

Let us now, with these general considerations about the nature of truth and its different species in our minds, turn to the more particular examination of the claim of religious experience to be a means of truth. As the first necessity in the examination of that claim is that we should understand and enter into the nature of religious experience, it will probably serve our purpose best if we consider a classical description of a great religious experience. I propose to examine the account of a man's religious experience given in the Book of Job. We must try as far as we can to come to an imaginative understanding of what Job went through, and follow with our imaginations the problems with which he was faced and the manner in which he came to a solution of them. As we are particularly concerned with the claim of religious experience to give knowledge, I shall take as it were for my text that famous verse in the nineteenth

chapter, where Job suddenly in the very midst of his trouble sounds a first note of assurance.

## II

"I know that my Redeemer liveth."—Job xix. 25.

If you read a modern commentator on the Book of Job, you will find that many of those texts of orthodox doctrine and sentiment which show up so strangely in that most outspoken and fearless of all the books of the Old Testament turn out to be mistranslations. In particular the famous verses which follow this text in the nineteenth chapter, pointing to a sure and certain hope of all-glorious resurrection in which death and all the evils worse than death with which Job is wrestling are swallowed up in victory, are changed to words which express the bare conviction that somehow and at some time things will

be right. The change may be to some minds unwelcome at first sight, but it is surely right. The agony of Job or of the author of this book was not of the kind to be cured by miraculous previsions of Christian dogma. The truth that would help him, as the truth which will help any of us, had to come out of himself and his own experience—had to be a present truth.

The one thing in this passage no commentator proposes to take away or diminish is the note of certainty and assurance which has somehow come to Job out of his darkest perplexity and suffering. Suddenly his feet have touched bottom; he is on a rock; he can say, "I know." "I shall see God, whom I shall see to my own good, and my eyes shall see him, and not as one estranged." It does not matter that the reasons for his assurance are not what the Authorised Version gives us; that there are indeed no *reasons* given in this declaration of assur-

ance; that the book ends with a confusion of mystery and inexplicability. What he has found may seem to us a poor, beggarly comfort, a very reduced gospel, but he has it firm: it is his own. It is not a conjecture, a guess, a hypothesis, something he may venture to suppose, something to which the evidence seems to point. It is something he knows.

That obviously in religion is the one thing worth having. We are all familiar with a kind of defence of the truths of the Christian religion which shows that these are not altogether impossible, or that the balance for the evidence is somewhat in their favour, or that they are not more irrational than much that passes for science. Did the conclusions of apologetics of that kind ever comfort anyone at grips with life, or fire anyone to do his utmost in the service of his day and generation? Entering the kingdom of heaven, I remember an old teacher

of mine saying, is not like going out for a walk. If it were, hazy directions and probabilities might be good enough; but "the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence and the violent take it by storm." If our religion is not going to prove a firm rock on which we can set our feet in all the welter of sorrow and evil around us, we had better cut it out and have done with it.

If this certainty we must have, if nothing but knowing is any good to us, how are we to get it? It may help us in some way to answer that question if we consider how Job came to his knowledge. He did not find this necessary certainty of which he was so assured by discovering an intellectual answer to his questions and problems. The book ends, no doubt, with what we can accept dramatically as a solution—the wonderful speech put into the mouth of God which begins at the thirty-eighth chapter. But if you state Job's problem as an abstract in-

tellectual difficulty about the universe—how is the goodness of God compatible with undeserved suffering?—the last chapters give no intellectual answer at all to that problem. When we see before our eyes evil triumphant, the sincere assertion that the world is very mysterious and wonderful may suggest to us—and that is an important enough point in its way—that there may be an answer to our problem, though we do not see it; but that is not enough. And the moral of the end of the Book of Job is quite certainly not that we cannot know and therefore ought not to ask questions. That is the advice which one of Job's comforters gives and is condemned for giving. The man who wrote the Book of Job did not come to think that his persistent doubts had been a mistake. Had he come to think that he could never have written the relentless questioning of the early part of the book. The man who says, "Though he slay me and delay not,

yet will I maintain my cause against him," is unashamed. It is the ostensible defenders of God, the rebukers of doubt, who are reproved.

No one can, I think, read the end of the Book of Job without feeling that the man who wrote it had found an answer to his problem, though the speech put into the mouth of God is not so much the answer as an evidence of the fact that an answer has been found. Somehow Job has come out of that painful questioning into a stable place, where the world of nature with all its wonders and mysteries has become, instead of a terrible agonising hell, something whose mystery strengthens and sustains. Job or the author of the book can tell us that this has happened to him, but that is not in itself an explanation of what has happened. It is no accident that the verse which I have taken for my text, with its note of triumphant certainty, comes long

before anything which could even pretend to be an intellectual solution, that right out of the middle of Job's agony you have the first soundings of the theme which is to be so wonderfully developed in the last chapters and to end with Job's saying: "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee." Between the falling off of Christian's burden and the land of Beulah came the fight with Apollyon and the valley of the shadow of death.

How then did Job get his certainty?

The earlier chapters show him exposed to two temptations, which in our searching after life and truth remain temptations to us all—to be selfish, to get what relief we can from our own pains and let the rest of the world be as evil as it likes, or to cheat, to be dishonest, to say that things are all right when we know that they are not, to adopt that kind of faith which consists in believing what we know to be untrue.

When Job first gives vent to his misery, he is told to curse God and die, to take the relief for which he is longing and leave the world to be evil. And if we are troubled with the thought of the misery of the world, we can no doubt get some relief by deliberately becoming deaf to it. If we shut our ears long enough, we cease to hear, and get relief at the cost of the death of all but the animal part of ourselves.

Job puts that temptation from him and, as a result of his doing so, his agony ceases to concern himself alone; his complaint now is not that he is suffering, but that innocence is suffering, and suffering not only in the person of Job, but all over the world, and the impersonal agony so overmasters all thought of self in him, that it would be a relief to feel that he has somehow deserved punishment; that he is not only suffering but evil as well, if only at this cost he is enabled to think that God is not evil.

And with the thought comes the opposite temptation—to cheat, to be false to the facts as he sees them; to sink his own known misfortunes in the thought of the righteous universe without; to submit and say that what he knows to be wrong is right. He feels that he could bear his own misery if he could rest in the thought of the goodness of God, in the thought that all must be for the best, and that his dissenting mind is presumptuously misleading him. His friends counsel him in the name of authority and tradition. Is Job so sure of his own wisdom that he can maintain his own position against all the gathered experience of the ages? They press weighty considerations of this kind upon him. Job's friends are not just fools—but Job cannot accept the comfort they offer him without being untrue to himself, and he resists.

This second method of escape from the perplexities which life presents is the un-

selfish man's temptation, as the first is the selfish man's, and it is usually supported by a much greater body of authority. Many people will tell you that troubles and perplexities such as Job's mind was suffering only come from thinking and doubting, from rash presumptions in asking questions which cannot be answered, that the simple cure of such ills is to stop thinking and doubting, to submit to the authority of our elders and betters, who are obviously our betters because they are not and have never been troubled as we are being troubled. The method of escape which is offered to Job, and which he rejects, is one which many men accept, and its acceptance brings them relief and with relief a certain power of grappling with the ordinary demands of life.

But this relief is bought at a price. Job's friends begin harmlessly enough, but before they have gone very far they are driven to

defend God by accusing Job's children and Job himself of crimes for which they have not a jot of evidence. The doctrine which maintains that all human suffering is due to human guilt easily and inevitably becomes the doctrine that the unfortunate are also bad. Men justify God by condemning God in man. Men have, for example, justified the social systems of their time by saying that the poor are all thoughtless and idle—a doctrine which has the advantage of soothing their doubts and simplifying their social responsibilities. The spiritual descendants of Job's comforters, the Pharisees, cast out the man who was born blind as being altogether born in sin, and when Jesus disturbed their complacency by curing those whom they held that God had righteously punished accused him of casting out devils by Beelzebub. Jesus' answer was that they were committing the one unforgivable sin, the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

If men stifle the knowledge of good and evil in their hearts in order to believe more easily in God, as religion has so often asked men to do, they think unworthily of God and will soon think unworthily of their fellowmen. Superstition and cruelty go together.

Job puts these two temptations from him, even though he could only hold out at the cost of feeling utterly alone in the world. "Know now that God hath overthrown me, and hath compassed me with his net. Behold, I cry out of wrong, and I am not heard: I cry aloud, but there is no judgment. He hath fenced up my way that I cannot pass, and he hath set darkness in my paths." And out of the very midst of the negation and despair that seem the price of refusing to yield to these temptations, in his unselfishness and truthfulness, there suddenly comes an assurance that he is not alone, and he can say, "I know that my Vindicator liveth." He has found

something in himself which draws him out of himself, which gives him an ever-widening and deepening sympathy with and understanding of his fellow-men, and which culminates in the profound moral insight and tenderness of the great speech in the thirty-first chapter. As he follows the light within him, his concern for others as much as for himself, his persistence in holding on to the facts as he sees them, have led him to a place where he finds that what he is following is something beyond his own imagining, his own hopes or aspirations, something permanent and eternal. So there comes to him through this experience a sense of kinship, not only with his fellow-men but with all the wonderful and mysterious power of nature, till at the end he can say to God: "I have heard of thee with the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee." What he has learnt he can only indirectly express; for it can only be known in the

experience. "We cannot really speak of God," says Eckhardt, "when we would speak of him we do but stammer." But how he has come to that experience, with its certainty and assurance, is clear enough.

If now we consider this religious experience described in the Book of Job we may note these points about it.

It is to this extent not typical that the author of the Book of Job is obviously a man of more than usual intellectual honesty and more than usual concern with intellectual or philosophical difficulties. But that perhaps makes it the more interesting for the question we are considering. No one can suspect the author of the Book of Job of cheating; of cooking facts or arguments to suit his designs. It is sometimes supposed that any attempt to distinguish faith or religious experience as an instrument of truth from abstract thinking or matter-of-

fact observation means that we simply take the liberty to believe things true because we want them to be true. But the chief characteristic of the experience described in the Book of Job is a relentless intellectual honesty which refuses to yield to the demands of the desires.

Nevertheless, assurance and conviction are found without an intellectual answer being found. Religious conviction and certainty come from the will, are described as issuing out of resistance to temptation. But the will from which Job's certainty is described as issuing is a disciplined will. Job gets his assurance of God because he has refused to yield to his own immediate desires, because he has made his difficulty a moral and not a personal problem, and because he has submitted his mind to the facts as he sees them, and refused to mould the facts to his mind. Such an attitude is implied to some degree in all attainment of

truth. The disciplining of our powers in the acquisition of knowledge is a moral task. We all recognise how important for any kind of profound knowledge of life and reality the disciplined will really is. A man may be clever and yet a fool. There is a blindness and folly which has a moral cause, and a wisdom and insight which only moral rightness can give. It is mere folly to suppose that because the will is necessary to religious truth therefore the will makes true what it wants. The common testimony of all great writers on religion is that the only means of coming to religious assurance and knowledge is to learn by discipline of the will to give up merely personal desires and be humble and accepting. "I say, moreover, if the soul will know God," says Eckhardt, "it must be forgetful of itself and must lose itself; for so long as it regards and takes cognisance of itself, it regards not God nor has cognisance of him. If

for God's sake it loses itself and forsakes all things, it finds itself again in God." Job's assurance that comes to him at first as an immediate conviction becomes strengthened and confirmed by later experience. The final warrant for his assurance is not simply that it issues from a rational and disciplined source, a mind which has universalised its problems and been faithful to facts, but that eventually it is found to render a wider and wider stretch of experience intelligible. When it is claimed that religious experience is an immediate and individual conviction, it is often said that for such a conviction there can be no guarantee of objectivity. Individual intuitions vary and contradict one another, and that is all about it. We all know the mistakes into which men may fall, whether in art or conduct or religion, who trust solely to the sense of immediate conviction, as though that were a guarantee of infallible inspiration. In all real advances

of knowledge the vision or intuition or flash of light is essential, but it needs to be tried out. I know *Hamlet* to be a great play as surely as I know that two and two are four. I could not have that knowledge without the individual æsthetic experience involved in reading *Hamlet*, but I must admit in myself and can point to in others similar individual experiences, accompanied by conviction, where the conviction was afterwards dispelled. What gives an abiding and real certainty in our æsthetic judgments is that as we go back and back to some works of art they go on approving themselves and seem to unfold more and more of their meaning. The same holds true of religious experience. Immediate and individual as it is, there is a long way between the first experience of assurance and the state of mind expressed in " I know whom I have believed." The first immediate conviction is to be tested by its applicability to life,

by its coherence with the rest of what we learn, by its rendering reality intelligible as much as are those great intuitions which are the beginnings of great scientific discoveries.

Lastly, although religious assurance as described in the Book of Job is not got by intellectual arguments, faithfulness to intellectual standards when they are relevant heightens and enhances the quality of the religious experience, and unfaithfulness lowers and perverts it. This is a truth we are apt to forget with fatal consequences. We think that because science cannot give us religious truth, we may be as unscientific as we please when our thinking has to do with religion.

However distinct the various forms of knowledge may be from one another, unfaithfulness and slovenliness in any one of them will react on the others. It is the pure in heart and not the clever in head who are to see God; but being pure in heart is not really, as it is sometimes supposed to be,

compatible with cheating or carelessness. It is not the business of the poet to give a scientifically accurate account of natural facts. He may even get his poetic effects by deliberately exaggerating the natural though not the psychological facts. But his account of the natural facts will not therefore be wrong; it will be governed by canons as real though not the same as those which would govern the scientist. We are all of us, whether in science or art or religion, prone to give our minds a holiday when we get into the sphere in which we are not primarily interested; but if we are not conscious of doing it, or if we are always doing it, so that our attitude to those other spheres becomes one of habitual carelessness, we pay for it in the sphere in which we are interested. We can only attain true knowledge if we recognise the different canons of the different spheres and are faithful to them all.

## III

There is one other characteristic of the religious experience described in the Book of Job which we have not yet examined. In so far as it claims to be knowledge, the content of that knowledge seems to be very slight. Modern scholarship, as we saw, has reduced the doctrine asserted in the verse we have been considering and those which follow it to a general belief in the justice of the world, an assurance that is bare of detail and yet that "turns the dusky veil"—of evil and of suffering —"into a substance glorious," though it expresses a trust in rather than any knowledge about God. Job's experience expresses itself further in the great moral code of the thirty-first chapter and in the conviction that God in whom he trusts is behind the mysterious powers of nature. If we contrast such a confession of faith with any of

the great formularies of the Christian Church, are not these in all they have to say of the nature and attributes of God entirely different from the almost bare simplicity of Job's assurance? If we have shown that the latter has claims to be regarded as knowledge, is that in any way relevant to the question of the truth of Christian formularies? Is not the moral of this examination of the Book of Job not rather that those mystics are right who say that the knowledge of God is incommunicable; that it throws light on other things and can be tested by that light, by the moral inspiration and the understanding of nature which come from it, but that in itself, for all the assurance expressed in "But now mine eye seeth thee," it is ineffable and remote from the multiplicity and detail of the phenomenal world; and that therefore all the elaboration and detail of creeds and theo-

logical formularies are so much useless lumber?

Further, has not the analogy between religious and poetic truth suggested that religious experience is in its essence individual?

As you cannot begin to judge the truth of poetry unless you regard it as poetry, which means that you must recreate in yourself the poetic experience of which the poem is an expression, and in. which and similar experiences it alone exists, so the truth of religion as we have been defending it is the truth of the religious experience, because from that experience, and that alone, comes the illumination in the light of which reality is better understood: it is not the truth of the philosophical or historical propositions which can be deduced or evoked from that experience: not the truths, therefore, of the creeds or of the theology.

What then has religious experience to do with creeds and theological doctrines which are used as universal standards, which all members of a Church are expected to believe?

Seeing the depths to which the mind and spirit of man have again and again been stirred concerning creeds, and the centuries through which creeds survive, it would be strange indeed if they should prove to have no meaning or recognisable place in man's religious life. But what the real use and meaning may be has often been obscured by the extravagant and fanatical claims that have been made for them and which have often only succeeded in converting them from instruments of help to instruments of exclusion.

It will hardly be denied but is often forgotten that whilst creeds take their rise from such confessions of faith as Peter's "Thou art the Christ, the son of the living God,"

or as the Book of Job, they are themselves something different—more systematic and more standardised. We have in them neither the record of an intense individual experience nor the imaginative presentation of human experience, but rather the expression of an abstract summing-up of the central and standard tendencies observable in many such records of experience. We might say that creeds are attempts to express not the mind of this or that believer, but what is called the mind of the Church. But "the mind of the Church," like "the mind" of any other community, is the minds of all its members in so far as they are filled with the spirit of the community, and it can only be properly expressed through those members and through their differences as well as through what they have in common. It takes all the differences between Christians and all the individual experiences which they have to contain the

mind of the Church or to express the full significance of the life and death of Christ. The "mind of the Church," therefore, cannot find a single expression in words in the way in which the experience of an individual can, and creeds and formularies cannot stand to "the mind of the Church" as the confession of faith of the individual believer, such as the confessions of Job or St. Peter, stands to the experience of the individual. The suggestion implied in the "I believe" of the creeds, that there is a single pattern expression to which we should all come, is a mistaken one. Even if we replaced "I believe" by "We believe" we should still have to remember that what follows not only has arisen out of but must also point back to the "I believe" of countless individual minds and experiences.

But what, it may be asked, of the historical element in creeds? Is it not claimed for the creeds that they set forth, or, so to say,

hall-mark the historical facts relevant to man's salvation, on which all true religious experiences are founded?

Christianity is an historical religion, but what that means needs some consideration. We saw that there were two kinds of truth implied in history—the scientific truth of its facts and the significance which it found in its facts. That significance depends, as we saw, on a proper understanding of the importance of different elements in reality, and that involves a knowledge and appreciation of those elements in the present. What matters is the universal element which the historical fact displayed and its actualisation in history then and now. We do not believe that a revelation as to the nature of God *was* true in the past unless we believe it *is* true now and always. But whatever may be the importance of the historical facts in the Christian creeds, these creeds are not primarily statements of historic fact, but statements of the

significance of historical facts. To be a Christian means to find the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth the most significant thing in the world; that means that the more we study that life and death, the more we try to understand it, and above all the more we devote ourselves to following and living according to its principles, the more intelligible will reality become to us. But all that is something which we cannot find out unless we try, and can indeed only find out to the extent that we try. Christianity is not an intellectual proposition which our mind can accept, nor a work of art which can inspire our imagination while our will remains aloof. The significance of the life and death of Christ can only be understood by ourselves living and, as St. Paul says, in some sense dying with Christ. I once saw in a religious paper a reference to those "who believed in the Nicene Creed as an historical fact," as if such persons alone

attained a true standard of orthodox belief. But to believe the Nicene Creed is not to believe in *it* as an historical fact, but in its account of the significance of certain historical facts, and it is well to see what nonsense the notion of the Nicene Creed as a statement of historical fact really is. The Nicene Creed contains assertions of historical fact. Its assertions imply that if we had been present at a certain place at a certain time we should have seen someone "crucified . . . under Pontius Pilate" and "rising the third day." The Creed treats the Virgin Birth and the Ascension in the same way, and if we believe that these doctrines are not true statements of historical facts, but the result of men's inveterate habit of translating religious and spiritual truth into material and historical fact, we do not strictly believe the Nicene Creed. But the great part of the Creed consists of statements not of facts or events that could

have been apprehended by the bodily senses, but of spiritual significance. We are not more religious than other people, but less if we think that if we had met Jesus and his disciples in Palestine we should have seen men looking as though they had stepped out of a stained-glass window with haloes on their heads: we are only wanting to have our religion supported on the non-religious plane, and we are turning our backs on all that Jesus taught of religion when we do that. We are imagining that we can get religious truth without being religious, which is as foolish as to imagine we could get moral truth without being moral.

Sed quid invenientibus?
Nec lingua valet dicere
Nec litera exprimere.
Expertus potest credere
Quid sit Jesum diligere.

In departing from the individual's expression of the significance he has himself

discovered in his own experience and in his own reading of historical fact, creeds and formularies stand for an important truth which is the complementary of the one on which we have been so far insisting; namely, that while religious experience must be individual, it has nevertheless a standard of comprehensiveness; that while the significance of the life and death of Christ must be realised by individual minds, they will have much to learn of that significance from the religious experience of others. The creeds and doctrines are, as it were, signposts to discovered significance, or, as they are called in Scotland, standards.

Most of our existing theological standards play this part badly enough. They are like signposts which have become illegible with age or can be made out only by those who know beforehand what is written on them; but we need something to remind us that the individuality of experience is

enriched, not impoverished, when we know and share the experience of others.

> Ages of heroes fought and fell
> That Homer in the end might tell

and so inspire his hearers to a greater heroism.

For this holds of all forms of experience. Poetic experience must be individual, but he would be a fool who therefore thought that he should read nothing but his own poetry, who did not recognise that there was a great world of poetic experience by entering which his own individual experience would be enriched and made more comprehensive. If truth is always something alive—existing not in text-books or formulæ, but in men's minds, it exists in the minds of men in so far as they are trying to understand a reality beyond themselves and infinitely comprehensive—not in the mind of any one man, or only in the mind of any one man in so far as he is a member of the commonwealth of knowledge and not in so far

as he vainly tries to be individual by keeping aloof from others.

Our religious experience must be our own. In the significance that each man finds in the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth there will always be something individual and special for each—the word of God for him. It will never be a standardised experience. But it may easily be, just because it is our own, one-sided. It is bound to be less adequate and less comprehensive, and therefore less true than it might be, if it is not enriched by contact with the religious experience of others, if we do not remember that we are "compassed about with a great cloud of witnesses." And though creeds will not of themselves provide the discipline and the enrichment that the individual needs, yet they will serve a great purpose in so far as they can be made to remind us to lay claim to and to enter into the great heritage that has come down to us.

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